

# HUMBLEWOOD™

## GUIDE TO ALDERHEART

### VO.5



Note: This content is still being edited and designed, new versions to follow!

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Lauren Henderson

# A Humble Calendar

## EXCERPT FROM THE VAULT KEEPER'S ALMANAC

Over my long life, I have peered into countless worlds with grand civilizations, where powerful magics and altered physical laws hold sway. I have beheld the birth of gods and the deaths of entire cosmos. So, naturally, it took me by surprise when a rather unremarkable little world piqued my interest.

In my studies of "Everden," as it is known by its inhabitants, I find myself just as intrigued by the customs of the creatures who make their homes here as by the tantalizing mysteries that lie at their world's center.

Time has always fascinated me, more so now that I see from the perspective of the infinite. I must admit, I was greatly amused by the oddly charming method the inhabitants of this place devised to chart the passage of time. It seems that the first record keepers of Everden's history were bards of some sort: these musicians began incorporating the noteworthy events of a solar revolution into a song that could be passed down through generations. As these minstrels traveled and shared their story-songs, their role evolved from the purely musical to the more consciously historical. They became known as "songkeepers," though few who hold this distinction today practice music. Honoring these historical beginnings, time in Everden has since been recorded in musical terms. Adorable.

Solar years in Everden last for 360 days and are measured in periods known as **songs**. By their reckoning, the current calendar year is Song 786. Everden itself is far older, of course, though I doubt these limited beings will ever discover just how old...

Nevertheless, their songkeepers continue to search for evidence of what happened "in the time before song". Much of this ancient history has passed into myth and legend. As expected, these creatures have failed time and again in their attempts to discern fact from fiction.

Each song consists of four 3 month-long cycles called **verses**, and each verse corresponds to a season in nature (Everden knows only four seasons, the same as many other unremarkable worlds). The inhabitants of Everden still use familiar terms like "Spring," "Fall," and so on, but each season has its own verse in the calendar.

Each lunar month lasts for 30 days and is known as a **chorus**. There are 12 choruses to a song. As you might expect, different geographic regions in this world calculate time differently, but I have found the calendar used in the forested land called "Humblewood" and its surrounding regions to be particularly amusing. I have made note of it here.

## SEASONS OF EVERDEN

Season (Verse)	Chorus		
Spring (The Dawning Verse)	1. Branchbud	2. Springbloom	3. Seedsown
Summer (The Rising Verse)	4. Shimmertide	5. Sunscrest	6. Glimmerhaze
Autumn (The Fading Verse)	7. Seedreap	8. Treeturn	9. Shadesway
Winter (The Dimming Verse)	10. Firstfrost	11. Wintersdeep	12. Newlight

A chorus consists of five six-day spans known as **measures**. The days that comprise these measures are often called **beats**, though the creatures of this world still use the terms “day” and “night”, as these feature prominently in their myths and cosmogony. The name of each beat in Humblewood’s measure is derived from an “Amaranthine” (what passes for a god in this world). From first to last these are named **Ardwil**, **Gesdwil**, **Redwil**, **Handwil**, **Aldwil**, and **Tydwil**, respectively.

Oddly, Clhuran, their Amaranthine of fate, is not given a named beat. Songkeepers say that this is because Clhuran is present in all days. How fanciful!

I have taken the liberty of organizing Everdenian expressions of time in a more comprehensible form. Refer to the table below for an understanding of how these terms relate to more conventional expressions of time

## TIME IN EVERDEN

Unit of Time	Also known as...	Is made up of...
1 day	A beat	24 hours
1 week	A measure	6 beats
1 month	A chorus	5 measures or 30 beats
1 season	A verse	3 choruses or 15 measures or 90 beats
1 year	A song	4 verses or 12 choruses or 60 measures or 360 beats

While my real interest lies in the more ancient mysteries of this otherwise unassuming world, I nevertheless find the adorable customs of its inhabitants to be a pleasant diversion. Perhaps I will venture there myself someday. It’s been ages since I’ve taken a vacation...

The All Knowing Randmodius,  
Vault Keeper

# Alderheart Traveler's Guide

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## *Greetings From the Author, Jonall Hannu*

The skies see you, traveler!

Alderheart is a city unlike any other. Shaped from the majestic Evertree from which it takes its name, Alderheart is a cultural and mercantile metropolis: the beating heart of the Humblewood region. It is a city filled with magic, history, and customs that might seem strange to you, but is without a doubt one of the most welcoming places I've ever had the pleasure of visiting.

And who am I guiding you through this city? A seasoned traveler, a merchant by trade, and one who has perused the stalls of Alderheart's markets many times. Though I come from the plains of Firnveldt, I've journeyed across this land: from the northern edge of the Crystal Wastes to the southernmost tip of the Tanglewilds, and just about every place in between! While I may not be a sage or storykeeper, I've picked up a thing or two just by asking questions and keeping records. Take this wanderer's word: everything written here is true, my hand to the stone. I can only hope you find something of use from my accounts.

And so, dear traveler, I offer my guide to the wondrous city of Alderheart.  
May it serve you well.

*Jonall Hannu*

To the one in possession of this modest guide to Alderheart, I, Jonnall, hope you enjoy my account of the Great Tree City. Should you ever have the good fortune to visit the city in the summer months and find yourself in need of supplies, gear, or another well-written guide, look for the tent marked "Hannu's Provisions" in the Canopy Market!

Jonnall Hannu





# The Humblewood Region

Alderheart is the capital of the Humblewood region, which borders my homeland of Firnveldt. The tall great Evertree of Alderheart is visible from the towering mountains that divide Firnveldt from Humblewood. As you exit the western mountain border of Humblewood, you'll find the land quickly slopes into a gentle valley. From there, if you follow the main road that winds between the great charred plains of the Scorched Grove and the marshes of the Mokk Fields you'll be on your way to Alderheart.

Regardless of the direction you approach the city, to reach Alderheart you'll need to travel through Humblewood's vast forest. While few rivers run through the forest, community wells prove that there is more than enough water deep underground to support the small communities in the Wood. What shallow streams pass through the forest flow towards the south.

Every time I come here, I always respect how uneven the land around Alderheart is compared to the plains of my homeland. The forest floor can rise as small hills and suddenly descend into shallow crags and caves. Thankfully, the trade roads that traverse the forest are well-traveled and mostly flat. Otherwise, my gargath\* traveling companion, Bello, would have a tough time.

While traveling the forest, you'll come across the magical plants and animals that call Humblewood home. Some of these creatures are gentle, but others can be extremely dangerous. If you spot bright yellow eyes watching you from the shadows of the brush, or catch a whiff of sulfur on the wind, you'd best hurry along! Keep a hand on your blade, just in case.

## THE EVERTREE

Before you stand at the foot of the Alderheart tree, it can be hard to comprehend just how enormous it is. Folks say this metropolis grew from a seed gifted by the Amaranthine. Given how imposing the great tree is, I like to imagine that the gifted seed would rival Bello in size.

Nobody is quite sure of the tree's origins, but what's certain is that Alderheart was seeded in powerful magic. Alderheart is no ordinary tree: it's a very special plant known as an Evertree, one of only a handful in existence. These magical trees grow to titanic sizes, and druids believe they are closely tied to the Great Rhythm. I've laid eyes on the exalted Evertree that grows in the great jungle of the Tanglewilds and I have heard one grows across the Songsea, in the Gasparian Isles.

Citizens of Humblewood will tell you that trees of the humble forest are pretty old and wise, but that Evertrees are a whole other story. It's thought that Alderheart might be as old as the Wood itself... maybe even older. Those gifted with plant-speech have managed to converse with Alderheart, and are quick to let you know that the Evertree has its own will. Many a tree-shaper has a tale about having to put their work on hold because Alderheart just wasn't up for change that day.

Some have claimed that the tree has chosen them to make its will known by sending visions, and sharing dream-like scenes of things it has seen throughout its long life. Many earnestly trust in those who claim to be blessed with the Evertree's visions, and though genuine cases have been documented, several claimants have been exposed as charlatans. Be wary of someone who asserts that they've been chosen by the Evertree, especially if they're trying to sell you something.

## THE ORIGINS OF ALDERHEART

One of the more important things a traveler ought to know about their destination is its history. Alderheart didn't sprout up overnight, and its past is written on every branchroad and building. You can learn a lot about the history of the Great Tree City from exploring its libraries and museums, so be sure to give them a visit if you get the chance!

## THE FIRST INHABITANTS

If you are hoisted into the branches of the city by a lift, or climbed up the winding stairway from the forest floor to the city's Canopy, you'll be treated to the sight of one of Alderheart's five great gates. Though these old entrances are monuments to the past of this great city, folks were living in Alderheart's branches long before their construction.

The first inhabitants of Alderheart were birdfolk. Nowadays, the birdfolk of Humblewood see themselves as kith and kin, but in earlier times they were self-governing distinct peoples. The five birdfolk clans—the corvums, the gallus, the lumas, the raptors, and the strigs—lived in their own communities in the Wood. Birdfolk from different clans were just as likely to be enemies as friends, and each had ways and customs the others didn't care to understand.

By the account of most scholars, birdfolk began living in Alderheart as early as Song 198. The first to inhabit the Evertree were a band of outcasts from various birdfolk clans. Many were druids, who led their companions to commune with the spirit of the Great Tree. They were the first to learn the tree's name. After hearing of their wish to coexist without clans, Alderheart invited the birdfolk to live in its branches.

The mighty Evertree taught the druids tree-shaping magic that allowed them, if a tree consented, to create homes and other structures within the tree. Using this magic, the druids shaped stairways to the very top of Alderheart. Where the steps converged, a place of worship was fashioned into the Evertree's canopy. Over time, this small settlement grew into a haven for birdfolk who wished to escape their clans' endless feuding. The gentle folk of the treetop turned away no peaceful soul, and Alderheart became known as unaligned territory among the birdfolk: a place where all were welcome to live a life of harmony, or pay homage to the great spirits of nature.

It wasn't just the birdfolk who found a home with Alderheart. Those who weren't birdfolk, commonly referred to "humblefolk", lived in a village amidst the undergrowth near the northwest side of the tree. This settlement, known as Bramblewell, was established among the Evertree's exposed roots shortly after birdfolk started populating the canopy. Bramblewell is a ruin now, but the poorly kept surviving records estimates that it existed between Song 208 and Song 312. By all accounts, Alderheart was more than big enough to support both settlements, and the two communities coexisted peacefully for decades.

By Song 353, the birdfolk had erected the great treetop temple to the Amaranthine called Holybranch. Pilgrims visiting the Holybranch would pass through Bramblewell with coin to spend and wares to trade. Thanks to these wayfarers, Bramblewell thrived.

The treetop community also blossomed, becoming a monastic center with skilled healers and those in tune with the spirits of nature. The canopy was considered a sacred place close to the Great Rhythm. Though eager to accept temple acolytes and visiting pilgrims, it grew more slowly than the town below.

While neither community grew very wealthy, they both prospered and knew little hardship. However, this time of peace didn't last.

In those early days, between the settled communities, the Wood was a relatively lawless place: each region lived by different social contracts and laws, which caused discord and led to confusion. The various bandits, robbers, and crooks of Humblewood reckoned they could use this to their advantage, and in Song 402, joined together to form a great pack of thieves known as the Bandit Coalition. To this day, the Bandit Coalition's name and insignia is used by bandits and brigands to spark fear in the hearts of honest folk.

The Coalition raided every corner of the land. Even the birdfolk in their high up perches weren't safe from the Coalition. The bandits came prepared. With ropes, ladders, and cunning tactics, one by one the settlements of the forest were ransacked. Only the Evertree was left unscathed. Its trunk was too tall to scale, its stairways too narrow to storm, and its bark too thick to burn.

Bramblewell, like the rest of the wood, was invaded by the Coalition. While the Bandit Coalition sacked and burned the little town, its inhabitants took shelter in the Great Tree. However, with the assistance of Alderheart's canopy, each time Bramblewell was raided, its people rebuilt it stronger than before. Bramblewell raised cobblestone walls and other fortifications, remnants of which still endure in the ruins around Alderheart. Townsfolk with combat skill organized into a trained militia, becoming a bulwark against the bandit raids.

In turn, Bramblewood ensured that the treetop community continued to receive supplies, and kept watch for anyone

who might try to steal up into the canopy through the tree's hidden stairways. From above, acolytes kept watch for signs of approaching marauders while healers from the temple village treated Bramblewell's wounded. In supporting each other, both communities were strong enough to resist the Bandit Coalition's threat.

As Bramblewell grew, it opened its gates to the wounded and frightened villagers from the nearby forests. It wasn't long before the Great Tree of Alderheart was established as a symbol of hope to the denizens of Humblewood. Birdfolk from the divided clans began to look to Alderheart as a place of safety and security, paving the way for the city's founding.

## THE FOUNDING

Touring within Alderheart, you'll spot monuments to the city's founders. Their names might adorn streets and buildings today, but they started out as a motley collection of representatives in the midst of crisis. In Song 411, as the Bandit Coalition swept across the Wood, the birdfolk and humblefolk sent representatives to Bramblewell to attend the Conference of Springbloom to discuss how to organize themselves to stand against the bandit assault. Those who gathered there would drastically change the course of history.

Among those who gathered were the ones remembered as the founders: the wily corvum wizard Edwin Ebonhart, the just luma dignitary Ava Windsweft, the gallant strig commander Grido Snowtarn, the even-tempered gallus elder Hevod Sunspring, and the fierce raptor warrior Ferro Keer. Dignitaries from among the humblefolk arrived too, but wrongfully, they are not well remembered: the famed vulpin merchant Lady Verl Sangrenard, who established vast trade networks across the Wood, and the genius mapach inventor Geswick Switch, whose mechanical expertise was renowned. The honorable mayor of Bramblewell, a jerbeen named Fennel Jeramis, was also in attendance.

After days of conversations and heated debate, Edwin received a vision from Alderheart. In it, the mighty Evertree expressed its wish to shelter the people of the Wood from the Bandit Coalition. To this end, Edwin suggested building a safe haven for those fleeing the Bandit Coalition: a city, the likes of which no one had ever seen, atop Alderheart. Disagreement over who would lead this new city ensued, Bramblewell fearing a loss of autonomy if joint rulership of the two settlements was to be installed in the proposed city. Moreover, it was put forward that a city founded by members from each birdfolk clan would serve as a unifying force among them. Eventually, without an enthusiastic consensus, it was resolved: the birdfolk would form a council to oversee the new treetop city, in order to ensure equity between the clans. The humblefolk, would govern over the city of Bramblewell below.

Ava heartily agreed to this plan, seeing the potential to rally the feuding birdfolk clans behind a common cause. Hevod was

touched by the Evertree's message of kindness, and they set about conceiving of living spaces for birdfolk and humblefolk alike. Grido was knowledgeable in the ways of war, and he wanted to ensure the new city's defenses were as solid as the mountain homes of his people. As a great hunter and warrior of her people, Farro offered to organize birdfolk into a force that could battle any predators that might threaten the city. Lady Verl Sangrenard, regardless of her reservations, promised to help the founders cover building expenses and to help secure materials needed for construction. Geswick Switch said little at the meetings, but set to work drawing up blueprints for new inventions that would make the marvelous tree city possible. His handiwork can be seen today all over Alderheart in the pulley systems, lifts, and stabilization platforms.

The last to agree was Mayor Jeramis, allowing the new city to be built because it could bring more prosperity to the humblefolk-governed Bramblewell. Additionally, the newly-formed city would be sworn to help and protect Bramblewell, a promise many feel Alderheart broke by standing idly by while Bramblewell collapsed into disrepair. With the final terms agreed to, construction on the treetop city of Alderheart began on the 30th day of the Springbloom chorus, Song 411.

## THE FLEDGLING CITY

Alderheart's early layout was drafted by Hevod, who drew up plans for grand open treetop plazas, as well as blocks of comfortable houses in the city's center, where non-birdfolk would be safe from falling. Hevod's grandest designs would take time to implement but became the foundation for the city's Canopy level. Beyond the canopy and with Grido's guidance, Hevod also designed the city's fortified entry points to prevent infiltration by smugglers and bandit scouts.

Unlike the newer city constructions, you'll notice that older buildings and structures in the Canopy aren't shaped out of Alderheart's wood. The city of Alderheart was raised quickly, and therefore very little shaping could be used. This architectural legacy can be appreciated today in the homes of the wealthy in the Canopy. Alderheart's elite continue to favor a more classic architectural style that uses materials from across Humblewood and does not incorporate shaping.

This foundational style emerged from Edwin's collaborations with Geswick to realize the mapach inventor's efficient system of lifts and pulleys. The pair established walkways and stabilizing platforms to help keep structures built closer to the edge of branches accessible and resilient against storms. Edwin, who possessed an interest in astronomy, also commissioned the first great observatory in the canopy.

As the fledgling city was quickly raised, Ferro trained anyone who volunteered in the ways of agile branch-to-branch combat and archery. The armed company she founded would become the backbone of Humblewood's defenses, the Perch Guard. While many birdfolk excelled in techniques of branch

skirmishing and dive attacks, this fighting style relied on gliding and weren't suited to the humbelfolk of Bramblewell, who were taught the use of ranged weapons. Though the Perch Guard of today is associated with the agile, spear-wielding techniques of Farro's birdfolk contingent, the first Perch Guard was equally composed of humblefolk archers and birdfolk skirmishers.

Once ready, Grido assisted in the deployment of the newly-trained Perch Guard forces to strategic locations around the tree to watch for bandit attacks.

## THE BATTLE OF ALDERHEART

Today outside the Council Plaza Courthouse a wooden obelisk shaped from the Alderheart tree bears a gold plaque engraved with the names of those who gave their life in the Battle of Alderheart. This battle called upon birdfolk and humblefolk alike to come together to defend their homes. Vines of goldblossoms grown around the memorial bloom every song, marking Alderheart's victory and honor the memory of those who fell in combat.

By Song 412, the foundations of the city of Alderheart were complete, though it would scarcely be recognizable today. The early city was localized near the south side of the Evertree and wasn't much more than a fortified settlement built up around the temples of yore. Nevertheless, the Bandit Coalition soon heard rumors of the city built to resist them and made plans to crush the young city to maintain their stronghold on the Wood. Fortunately, Alderheart caught wind of the Coalition's plan, and had time to prepare while the bandits organized their scattered forces. In Song 413, the founders led Perch Guard forces to the city's defense in The Battle of Alderheart.

At the start of summer, the Bandit Coalition launched a ferocious attack against the Great Tree City. Armed with flaming catapults and great ballistas, the Coalition's goal was to demolish the Evertree, and with it, the fragile hope that anyone in the Wood could resist the Coalition's combined might. The steadfast leadership of the founders and the discipline of Alderheart and Bramblewell's combined forces won out, beating back the attacking bandits over ten days of bitter fighting. The Coalition's defeat hobbled their forces, and led to the end of their threat to the Wood for songs to come.

In Song 415, Alderheart established its governing body, the Birdfolk Council. Their first act was to sign the Humblefolk Treaty with leaders from towns and villages across the Wood, effectively placing all of Humblewood under the protection of the newly established Perch Guard. An age of chaos that had reigned for nearly fifteen songs finally came to an end.

## THE GREAT TREE CITY

As you stroll through Alderheart, you'll find Perch Guard patrolling the branchroads and keeping watch from towers and guard posts. With their shining armor and banner-clad spears, the Perch Guard are a symbol of Alderheart's security and strength.

After their momentous victory over the Bandit Coalition in Son 413, the city attracted migrants and merchants from all over the Wood looking to rebuild their lives. Soon, the great markets in the Canopy and Trunk were constructed, new residents set up homes on the new branchroads, and tunnels were dug out throughout the trunk.

Word of a better life to be had in the Great Tree City trickled down to the roots of the Evertree. The call of fortune in the city above outsung any loyalty one may have had to Bramblewell. Bramblewell was able to sustain itself for some time while many called for assistance from Alderheart. Alderheart, preoccupied with its own affairs, neglected Bramblewell. The little town would never again regain the status it had prior to the Great Tree City's founding. As folks began to migrate from Bramblewell up into the Trunk of Alderheart, the town's population dwindled, and by Song 448, Bramblewell was abandoned for good. Now only scant, overgrown ruins remain of the once proud community, but its legacy lives on in the humblefolk who reside in Alderheart to this day.

During the summer of Song 486, a forest fire of unheard of proportions raged in the Wood. This event is forever remembered by the folk of the Wood as the Great Calamity. Nobody knows exactly how the fire was first lit, or how it was finally extinguished, but the blaze reduced the entire western section of the forest to cinders, leaving behind a flame-cursed plain of ash known as the Scorched Grove. In all my travels, I've never seen anything quite like it. It mars the face of the Wood like a scar: an eerie place of searing winds, smoldering soil, and strange monsters. I'd give the Grove a wide berth, dear traveler, as it is filled with dangers.

In the aftermath of the Great Calamity, many who once lived in the Grove, most of them humblefolk, had lost loved ones, homes, and livelihoods to the inferno. Once again, they looked to Alderheart for aid. The Birdfolk Council responded by decreeing that new tunnels be shaped in the lower Trunk to

make homes for the influx of residents. Ever since the Calamity, humblefolk have outnumbered birdfolk in Alderheart, but did not gain representation on the Council for quite some time. The shortfall of not adopting humblefolk representation on the Council is still a dark mark on the city's history as it prevented some from sharing in the city's prosperity.

As the Trunk filled, and the city began to turn folk away, those desperately seeking a home began to secretly dig into Alderheart's roots. Though crude at first, over time a network of tunnels was formed, and small communities developed within them. For these root-dwellers, life was hard, and some resorted to thievery and smuggling to survive. The Council discovered the secret tunnels in Song 721 and promptly sent tree-shapers to fill in the roots. Alderheart refused the tree-shapers. It was the Evertree's wish to provide shelter to those who needed it.

In Song 723, Alderheart agreed to the expansion of the once small tunnels, and the Roots became the final extension of the city. The Roots continues to be stigmatized by narrow-minded folk as a place of crime and villainy. Life in the Roots is still harsh, but for those who live there, it is their home, and that is worth fighting for.

## PRESENT DAY

This brings us to present-day Alderheart. Usually, things change pretty slowly in the Wood, but as I pen this guide, things have taken a bit of a turn. Forest fires have been running rampant of late, and though the Birdfolk Council has issued assurances that the matter is well in hand, some of the trusted scholars I've spoken to aren't so sure the fires are natural. I hope this is just a spat of unseasonable dryness, but I am confident that folks here will get by one way or another.

Alderheart withstood both the Bandit Coalition and the Great Calamity thanks to the strength of its people, but the checkered history of this city has folks feeling more divided now than ever before. My grandmother used to say that resentment is like a seed: try to bury it, and it only grows. Hopefully, by the time you receive this guide, the Great Tree City has taken steps to correct the mistakes of its past, and is writing a newer and better chapter in its history.



# Life in the Great Tree City

Alderheart stands out among the treetop settlements, or “perches”, that are common in Humblewood. As the capital, Alderheart is the seat of power and sophistication in the Wood. Alderheart is also a towering Evertree that plays host to many unique fauna that make their home in its branches. This duality forms such a big part of living here that those born in the city understand their daily lives might be interrupted by a gimlet infestation or a migrating swarm of gargamoths. Even visitors familiar with perch life will find that Alderheart has its own way of doing things, so don’t be alarmed if you feel a little lost at first. Herein lies what any traveler needs to know while visiting this fair city.

## SEASONS OF THE CITY

From the warmth of summer to the chill of winter, each verse brings something new to Alderheart. The Evertree is a living organism, and its seasonal changes are felt by all who live here, citizens and critters alike.

The turning of the seasons meets each section of Alderheart differently. The best place to experience the springtime flowering, the summer celebrations, or the crimson leaves of autumn is in the Canopy. From here, Alderheart also boasts positively spellbinding views of the surrounding forest and its seasonal changes.

By contrast, the Trunk lacks such breathtaking vistas, but is insulated from the extremes of each season. Down in the Roots, the temperature remains the same year round. Some fungi in the Roots’ tunnels wax and wane with the seasons, sprouting into a dense undergrowth in the humid summer months and dwindling as winter cold dries the air.

## THE DAWNING VERSE

The chorus of Branchbud signals the coming of spring, along with a host of colorful changes as the city shakes off the chill of winter. In these months, the denizens of the Wood celebrate the return of Ardea’s warmth with a grand celebration.

True to its name, flowering plants begin to bloom throughout Alderheart in the mid-spring chorus of Springbloom. This is also when animals stir from winter hibernation and others, such as songbirds and giant gargamoths, return from wintering in warmer parts of the world. As the birds fill the air with their songs, gargamoths flutter back to the pens of farmers who cared for them as caterpedes. Other insects burrow out of the ground, and a few make their way up the Evertree. Alderheart’s two-foot-long everbugs also return; count yourself lucky if one with five spots on its shell crosses your path, as the locals say it’s a sign of good luck!

Late spring is ushered in by the chorus of Seedsgrown. Also called “the green chorus,” this is a season beloved by gardeners, as it’s the best time for planting. The eggs laid by gargamoths also hatch around this time, yielding herds of caterpedes.

## AUTHOR’S NOTE: GIANT CATERPEDES AND SILK

Giant caterpedes, like the silkworms of Brackenmill, are an important resource in the Wood, which are fed and cared for by tree-farmers, who value them for their meat, as well as the silken threads they produce. A valuable commodity, the filaments are used to make fine fabric, sturdy rope, warm blankets, and other goods. Farmers care for the caterpedes until late summer, when the caterpedes begin to pupate into gargamoths. Should you happen to be in the market for silk thread, take my advice and wait until Glimmerhaze to buy. The grubs produce more as they get ready to turn into gargamoths, and farmers in the city sell their excess at a lower price.

## THE RISING VERSE

The Rising Verse of summer is announced by the chorus of Shimmertide. Summer is the best time to visit the city, in this humble traveler’s opinion, as the flowers are in full bloom and the streets are filled with revelers who’ve come to partake in the season’s festivities. It’s truly a sight to behold!

By the midsummer chorus of Suncrest, the air is filled with the droning of insects and a heady floral aroma from the many plants that grow on the Evertree. At this time, certain kinds of fruit-bearing vines become ready to harvest. Midsummer also sees the arrival of foot-long beetles in the skies around the city, as well as the eagles and griffinflies that hunt them. You can occasionally glimpse some of these beetles resting on the outer branches, their jeweled carapaces gleaming in the sun.

The end of summer is heralded by the chorus of Glimmerhaze, and the season concludes with another round of celebrations. As the nights grow longer, the heat becomes less intense, and you’ll be treated to some of the best sunsets of the season, if not the whole song.



#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: PESTS

Not all of the fauna living in the Great Tree City are welcome there. Travel enough and you'll learn that the creatures called "pests" by some folks are seen as bringers of good fortune by others. Some are fascinating critters too, even if only admired from a distance. Listed here are a few kinds of creatures that Alderites consider annoying or dangerous.

**Bluebees.** These sapphire blue-hued bees are an annoyance in the city from the start of Springbloom until the end of summer. Their stings contain a potent venom, and anyone stung by them drifts into a deep, dreamless slumber that can last for hours. Though most folks burn sticks of incense to keep the bees away from their homes and places of business, bluebee venom is in fact quite valuable. It's the main ingredient in a sleeping potion widely used by healers to help their patients rest. Several special apiaries have been established in the city to supply Alderheart's apothecaries with bluebee venom, though they are strictly managed.

**Dusktails.** These black-tailed squirrels are found across Humblewood, but those infesting Alderheart are among the most intelligent of their kind. They are swift, agile, and can eat just about anything. What's more, they're adept at sneaking into seed stores where they can quickly deplete food supplies. Though they are present in the city year-round, they are most active in the summer months when Alderheart swells with visitors. These little critters are such a problem that the city employs teams of squirrel-catchers to keep the population under control.

**Firelances.** Solitary wasps that grow to be a foot-and-a-half-long, these dangerous pests get their name from their red-orange coloration and the burning pain of their venom. Firelances are easily provoked, and it's best to leave them alone. If stung, you must apply antitoxin or see a healer immediately, as their venom can be fatal. Firelances are drawn to the city in late Shimmertide by the pungent nectar of a species of giant orchids that grow naturally on Alderheart's branches. The large flowers are called "witherhearts" for their dark purple-red inner petals, which resemble shriveled hearts. The flowers rely on firelances to spread their pollen, and because of this, witherheart cultivation is prohibited. The places where they grow naturally on the Evertree are closed to protect the public at the height of the season, when firelances are most active.

**Gimlets.** Rat-sized beetles reviled throughout the city because of the harm they can cause to the Evertree, these pests were accidentally brought to Alderheart on merchant caravans. Their quick growth rate and large numbers



of offspring have allowed gimlets to persist, despite the city's attempts to eradicate them. They lay their eggs in small crevices in Alderheart's bark, and once hatched, the larvae burrow deep into the Evertree. This can cause great damage to homes and branchroads alike. Gimlets are often killed on sight, but the beetles are quick, and can prove challenging to hunt. Gargamoths eat the colourful insect and therefore Alderites often keep gargamoths as pets to keep gimlets away.

**Slimes.** These tiny slimes differ from ones inhabiting other areas of the Wood. Living in the Roots of Alderheart, they feed on the fungi that grows there. How this invasive species arrived in the city is a mystery, but today they are singularly disruptive to fungal crops cultivated in Pestlehaven. The slimes are active year round, and their numbers swell in the humid summer months, when fungus grows rapidly. Scholars and slime-wranglers have come to the Roots to harvest the slimes for use in potioncraft, but so far nobody has found a use for the Alderian slimes.



**Talonflies.** These flies are as big as a birdfolk's thumb, and have a long curved mouthpiece that resembles a talon. They can be found in the city in considerable numbers throughout the summer, and they fill the air with the sound of their droning calls. Despite their name and fearsome appearance, talonflies are nectar-drinkers. These harmless bugs have a reputation as pests due to the size of their swarms and their ill-favored looks. Many in the Canopy have taken to killing them with alchemical smoke before they can intrude on their homes, gatherings, or businesses. Though they are not the prettiest creatures, I advise you to leave these flies alone, since they pollinate the city's most beautiful flowers.

## THE FADING VERSE

The harvest chorus of Seedreap marks the coming of fall to Alderheart. In general, fall is a calmer season, with folks coming to the city mainly to admire the changing leaves of the great Evertree firsthand and to participate in harvest time celebrations.

Vegetable-growing vines across tree-farms in the city are harvested at this time. Farmers also collect fungus grown on fruit vines from the summer that have been harvested and intentionally left to rot. Each variety of fruit vine has its own fungus, and while some are edible and grown for sale, others are fed to the bugs raised on these farms.

Because of its enormous size, the Evertree has an incredible amount of leaves. The leaves begin to fall around the mid-autumn chorus of Treeturn, and from the Great Tree City, the wind carries them eastward toward an ancient part of the Wood. It's also around this time that gargamoths leave to migrate to the warm jungles of the Tanglewilds. Non-migratory bugs are kept in weatherproofed corrals, where tree farmers ensure they are kept warm and fed throughout the cold season.

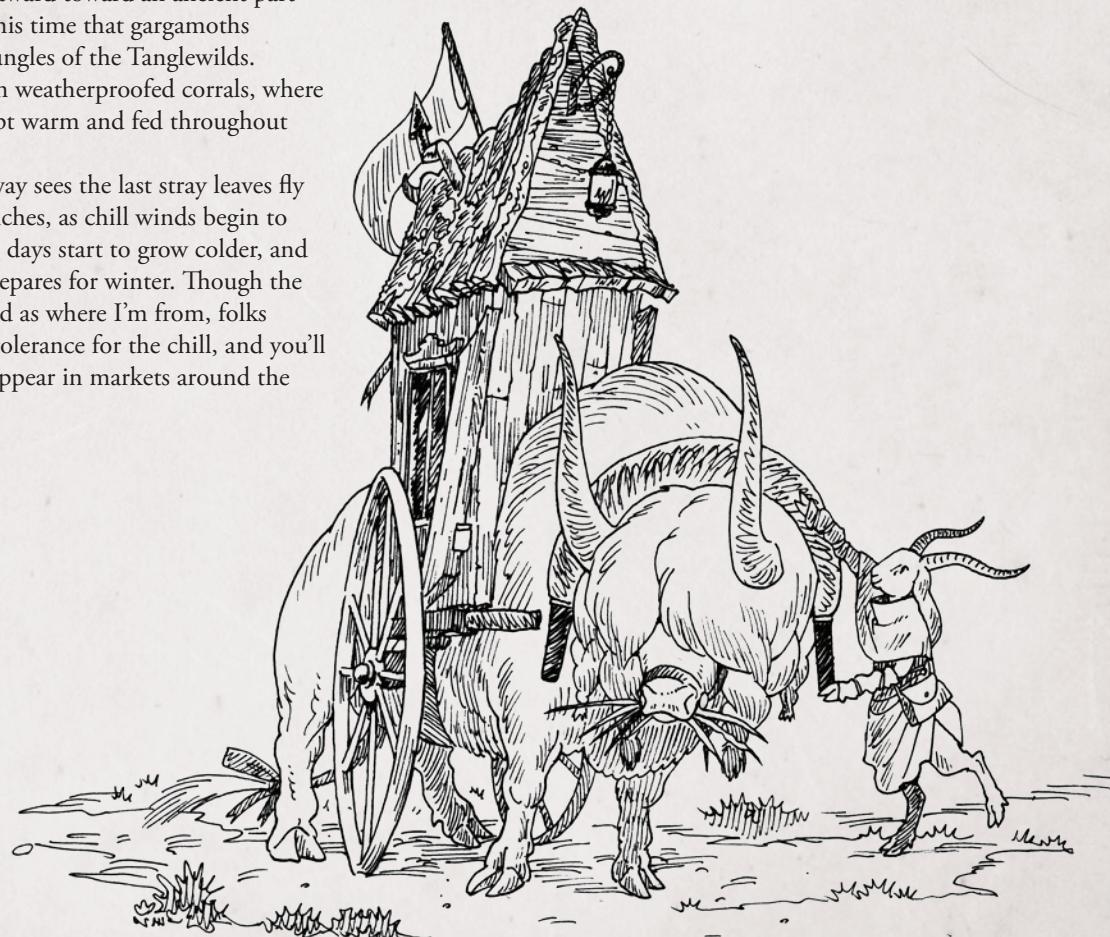
The final chorus of Shadesway sees the last stray leaves fly from Alderheart's exposed branches, as chill winds begin to whip through the Canopy. The days start to grow colder, and the nights longer, as the city prepares for winter. Though the winters here aren't nearly as cold as where I'm from, folks around here seem to have less tolerance for the chill, and you'll see warm clothing starting to appear in markets around the beginning of this chorus.

## THE DIMMING VERSE

The bleak, chilly winter season begins during the Dimming Verse, with the chorus of Firstfrost, which greets a Canopy stripped of its leafy protection. The city sees few guests during this verse, but visitors can take advantage of discounted rates on rooms in cozy inns throughout the city, where hearths will be lit to fend off the chill.

The following chorus of Wintersdeep signals the start of the bitterest cold of the season, when the brachroads are usually covered in snow, and the pace of the city slows, as merchants settle in for the winter. A few hardy vines that grow in winter are kept by some for greenery, but Alderheart's barren, snow-covered branches loom hauntingly through the long, still nights. The celebration of Glowingtide is held during this season, and throughout the holiday, the Evertree is lit by all sorts of lights, both for warmth and to help keep folks in good cheer through the coldest nights of the year. Thankfully, the most impoverished parts of the Roots and Trunk are well insulated during these cold times.

Finally, the cold begins to abate during the chorus of Newlight, which fills Alderites with anticipation for the new spring and helps to lighten the mood throughout the last days of winter. By the end of the chorus, ice and snow covering the brachroads starts to thaw, and folks in the city begin preparing for the spring and the new song to come. Be careful moving around the Canopy during this time, as the brachroads can get awfully slippery as they thaw!



## THE BIRDFOLK COUNCIL

The first Birdfolk Council was organized by founder Ava Windsweft, not only to govern the new city of Alderheart, but to foster a sense of unity among the five birdfolk clans. However, these clans held the largest perches in Humblewood, and leaders saw little value in undermining their own power. As such, many prominent city founders abstained from taking up seats on the Council. Grido and Farro refused nomination, some say out of loyalty to their clans, though others claim it was from fear of banishment. Hevod and Edwin refused as well out of concern that their respective clans would abuse the Council's authority for their own ends. Ava was fortunate that the lumas of Humblewood understood the need for birdfolk to look past their differences, and received her clan's blessing to leave them on good terms, and lead the city as best she saw fit.

Because only a few candidates for the Council came forward, the matter of who would govern the new city was put to Alderheart's citizenry. In return, the appointed Council members were to vote among themselves to decide who would serve as their leader. In the end, the council voted unanimously for Ava Windsweft, whose efforts were pivotal to the Council's formation.

There are currently only five seats on the Birdfolk Council: Brackenmill, The Avium, Saltar's Port, Marshview, and Alderheart. Perches that reach sufficient size and wealth can appeal to have a seat added, but the Council tends to make

these changes slowly, if at all. At the head of the Council is the Speaker, who wields veto power, which they are expected to use rarely and wisely. Speakers serve for as long as they are able, so these delegates are held to a very high standard. The Council can vote to strip the Speaker of their position in cases of abuse of power, but thankfully, no Speaker in all of Humblewood's history has ever needed to be removed this way.

The Council changed as Alderheart's influence spread, and small villages harassed by the remains of the First Coalition, or threatened by dangerous beasts, began to call upon the Perch Guard for aid. There were yet more struggles as perches of different birdfolk clans began to challenge Alderheart, but these were short-lived, and what remained of the clans' influence shrank with Alderheart's rise. In time, the Council came to govern the whole of the Wood.

In addition to being Humblewood's legislative body, the Birdfolk Council also serves as Humblewood's highest court. Anyone in Humblewood can request an audience with the Council and make their case, whether to suggest a change to a law, express an issue affecting the city, or to address a legal dispute that needs settlement. The council is often busy with the day-to-day tasks of governance though, and the wait to see them can be long, but they try to see as many citizens as they can. Larger disputes, however, are always scheduled in front of the Council, which decides the outcome based on evidence and witness testimony. In such cases, the Speaker acts as judge.



## CITY OFFICERS

The Birdfolk Council governs Alderheart with the same system of officers that is used across Humblewood, so the information provided here should also prove useful if you find yourself in another one of Humblewood's perches. There are three different kinds of officers: Judges, Officials, and Magistrates, each of which has different responsibilities.

### Judges

Judges work to settle most legal disputes within the city and are appointed by Birdfolk Council delegates based on both their understanding of the laws of the Wood as well as the quality of their character.

### Officials

Officials work under the Magistrate and help manage their work. In big perches like Alderheart, there are many officials, whose duties range from tax collection to approving new shaping requests. Officials can also petition Magistrates to amend city codes or laws based on input from folks in their districts. Officials are elected by city residents, to whom they are accountable. Though Officials have the authority to call upon the Perch Guard to make arrests, they can't settle legal disputes.

### Magistrates

Magistrates answer directly to the Birdfolk Council. Each perch has one Magistrate, who is elected into office by the folks who live there. Alderheart's Magistrate serves as both a lawmaker and an adjudicator. Generally, Magistrates can only craft laws that pertain to their own city or village, and their power is further limited by the Council, which must approve each law before it becomes official. Magistrates also have the authority to try criminals and enforce the laws of the Birdfolk Council, and they serve as judges on disputes too large to be handled by lower courts, but too small to be brought before the Birdfolk Council immediately. Magistrates are elected each song, and the most successful campaign tirelessly to maintain their positions. If you pass a Magistrate on the street, be sure to treat them with due respect. Their word alone can get you out of a spot of trouble!

## THE HUMBLE CODE

Among the first acts drawn up for the Birdfolk Council was a new set of laws by which Alderheart would be governed: The Humble Code. Founded on existing perch law, this codex lays out conventions for judging the law, holding fair trials, and enacting new laws. It was the first document to list different crimes and their punishments, ranging from community service to imprisonment. Over time, The Humble Code spread from Alderheart to all of Humblewood.

Despite widespread use, there are smaller villages where The Humble Code isn't followed as closely. In these places, traditional laws hold sway, and while this isn't exactly sanctioned by the Birdfolk Council, these communities are allowed to have their way as long as they aren't directly breaking any of The Humble Code's laws. Some folks call these parts of the Wood "lawless," but that's a far cry from what you see when traveling there. In most cases, they're just small, peaceful communities that choose to decide village matters with a town meeting, tribunal, or by deferring to a village elder, rather than relying on the system of Magistrates, Officials, and Judges. Perch Guard still patrol these areas and can be called upon in times of need.

## THE CITY CHARTER

With the spread of The Humble Code, laws pertaining specifically to Alderheart developed into a separate legal code. These regulations make up the Alderheart City Charter, which sets rules for city-specific matters, like where you can build and how you can get around in the city, as well as things like education and trade. Since Alderheart is the capital of the region, amendments to the City Charter can sometimes ripple out and lead to changes in The Humble Code itself.

## BUILDING AND SHAPING

Tree-shaping in the city is overseen by Alderheart's Magistrate in conjunction with the Shaper's Guild. Even though shaping is a gentle process, it can still be harmful to the Evertree if overused, so their guidance ensures that it has time to adjust to new shaping projects. Cutting or carving through the tree, however, is devastating to the Evertree. "Treeharm", as it is called, is punishable by law. Such crimes mostly occur in the Trunk and Roots, thanks to smugglers looking to create secret tunnels into and out of the city. Whether you're a citizen or a visitor, anything from sticking a blade into the bark to pulling healthy leaves from the tree is illegal. Though the Perch Guard understands that accidents can happen, if anyone catches you intentionally harming the tree, you can expect to be saddled with a heavy fine or time in a gaol.



## CRIME IN THE CITY

Like every big city, Alderheart has its share of crime, ranging from small transgressions of the City Charter to clear violations of the Humble Code. Some groups of criminals in the city have banded together, forming informal alliances mockingly called "Thieves' Guilds". These organizations aim to cheat, extort, or steal from visitors and citizens alike. Most of these groups are small and disorganized, but other, more dangerous gangs have flourished in the city. Some even have ties to the Bandit Coalition.

Though they are a far cry from the marauding horde of old, the Bandit Coalition is alive and well in the Wood. This confederation of robbers has small units that operate across Humblewood's roadways, and also have a strong presence in certain parts of Alderheart, especially in the Roots. There, certain communities have started to see the Bandit Coalition as a means of survival, a way to get back at the city's leadership, or both. Even if some good folks occasionally cast their lot in with them, the Coalition's methods are almost always harmful. The memories of the First Coalition's terror resonate with Alderites, and aligning with bandits carries the worst penalty of any crime in the city, as it is considered treasonous.



## CLUVUS "THE GODEFEATHER" LIGHTBREEZE

This venerable male sable luma is the leader of a dangerous and notorious crime family known as the Killer Flock. He managed to conceal his identity for years, and has gone into hiding since being discovered. He has bluish-grey plumage and dark eyes, and his beak has a distinctive scar across the front.



## ASTER "THE THORN" AMARYLLIS

A large, middle-aged male hedge, Aster is a captain of the Bandit Coalition and runs various criminal schemes with contacts in Alderheart. He has grey fur and long black quills, with dark brown eyes. He is a known killer and is incredibly dangerous.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE: ALDERHEART'S MOST WANTED

Regular bounties are posted in the Fortune Seekers' headquarters for any seasoned adventurers looking to help the City Watch arm of the Perch Guard apprehend some of the worst criminals in the city. These criminals are still at large at the time of writing, and I'd recommend alerting your local authorities immediately should you run into them.

**“LUCKY” SEVRAN DUSKTALON**

This young male dusk corvum was a former hitman employed by various criminal contacts throughout the city. He has dark, iridescent plumage with a prominent neck-ruff, and amber colored eyes. Known to hide poisoned daggers on his person.



**JERRIN “SNAPSHADOW” HOLLOWHOME**

A young female jerbeen agitator with a history of moving between different criminal factions within Alderheart. Jerrin has reddish-orange fur dotted with white speckles and blue eyes, though she usually keeps her face concealed under a cloak. She often carries concealed weapons.

**FINNEAS “BULLYBIRD” KLAWK**

An adult male huden gallus thug with ties to the Bandit Coalition, Finneas is a lower-ranking criminal who works for various Thieves' Guilds across the city, ambushing folks in alleys and tunnels in the Trunk and Roots and robbing them under threat of violence. He has brown plumage flecked with gold spots, and a distinctive cockscomb. He usually keeps himself well-groomed.



## THE PERCH GUARD

Alderheart is said to be one of the safest perches in the whole Wood. I don't know if that's entirely true, but the Perch Guard do their best to keep the peace. The Perch Guard are like a constabulary, a city militia, and a standing army all rolled into one, and for most law-abiding folks in the city, they represent safety and security. Regardless of your opinion of them, the Perch Guard aren't to be trifled with, unless you feel like cooling your hooves in a gaol cell.

### RANKS

The Perch Guard are organized under Alderheart's Captain of the Guard, who coordinates the organization's efforts across the city and the Wood. Under this Captain, there are two Lieutenants in Alderheart: the Lieutenant of the Watch, who leads the Perch Guard responsible for City Watch duties, and The Lieutenant of the Gates, who is in charge of Perch Guard soldiers tasked with defending the city from outside threats. Lieutenants <sup>in other</sup> perches across Humblewood are responsible for leading their own contingents, and they too report to the Captain of the Guard in Alderheart. Under these Lieutenants are Sergeants, each of whom command a squad of anywhere between eight and twelve guards. In the City Watch, sergeants are also known as "inspectors," and guards are often called "constables."

### THE SPEARS

A special Perch Guard infantry force called "The Spears" forms the bulk of the Perch Guard military responsible for keeping the Wood safe. Technically their own unit, The Spears have their own Sub-Captain who ranks above the Lieutenants, but who still answers to the Captain of the Guard. These elite skirmishers specialize in polearm-fighting and branch-to-branch combat, as well as aerial maneuvers like diving attacks. Normally, The Spears are found spread throughout the Wood, but they are brought into the city whenever the Captain of the Guard has a job for them, and for special occasions, such as the Farrosmarch parade.

## PRESENCE IN THE CITY

Perch Guard are active everywhere in the city, but they are especially noticeable in the Canopy. There, they can be seen watching over the districts in special posts positioned throughout the limbs of the Evertree, and around the City Gates. A few trained mages in the guard also use divination spells to keep an eye on the area. Perch Guard forces have special stations in each city district where folks can go to report a crime or call for the assistance of the City Watch. These guard stations are present in all levels of the city.

Brandishing a weapon is a sure way to get a guard's attention, and you can bet they'll intervene before you can do anything with it. The city has enough Fortune Seekers passing through that the Perch Guard doesn't outlaw weapons outright, but they should be kept in a sheath or stowed on your person, if possible, to avoid drawing suspicion. The same is true for spellcasters, as the City Watch knows magic can be more dangerous than twenty swords. It's wise to keep your spell focuses stowed, and to limit your casting to harmless spells, such as healing magic or entertaining illusions. Some guards receive training from experts at The Avium to recognize offensive spells from vocalization, gestures, and any components being used. Casting in a slow and deliberate manner is encouraged, as it's a good way to let anyone who may be watching know that you don't mean harm. Just make sure to mind your manners and you'll get on just fine.

Of course, committing crimes in the city such as theft, defacing property, or public drunkenness, could get you arrested. Depending on the severity of the crime, you might be looking at a fine, or a night or two in a gaol. For minor crimes, you're likely to end up doing community service, like cleaning the city or helping as a day laborer at one of the City's Gates until you've worked off your debt to society.

## HUMBLEFOLK IN THE RANKS

Though folks tend to think of the Perch Guard as being made up of birdfolk, humblefolk are just as qualified to become city guards or soldiers, and many apply to join the organization. This isn't to say that there's no discrimination in the Wood, and birdfolk are generally overrepresented within the Perch Guard forces. Despite most of their civic duties taking place on solid streets, the image of the Perch Guard as a force specializing in nimble, aerial combat has become so iconic that most humblefolk members of the Perch Guard find themselves stationed in the Trunk or the Roots rather than the Canopy. If you'll recall my comments on the city's founding, this is ridiculous. There's a proud history of humblefolk serving in the Perch Guard that many in the city seem to have forgotten, and you'd do well to treat each member of the Perch Guard with respect, whether they have fur or feathers.

## THE TENDERS

Another group commonly seen around the city is an order of nature-speakers known as the Tenders. Their order existed long before the city was founded, and counted among its number some of the first birdfolk who came to commune with the spirit of the Evertree. Nowadays, folks in Alderheart





Tender Insignia

see the Tenders in one of two ways: as useful shapers who help keep the city in balance with the Great Rhythm, or as a collection of odd folks who ought to spend more time in the Canopy than with their feet in the dirt. Regardless of what you may think of them, the Tenders have a strong presence in the city, and their doors are always open, should you wish to hear what they have to say.

You can find groves in the Trunk level where Tenders cultivate medicinal plants and fungi that grow naturally within the Evertree. The Tenders are knowledgeable herbalists, and folks regularly purchase their potions, tinctures, and salves. These commodities are their main source of income, though should you ever find yourself in dire need of care, no Tender worth their robes would turn you away. The Tenders who care for these groves are scholars and teachers, and they're always willing to help folks learn a thing or two about the art of healing or natural magic. Shaped buildings within their groves house archives of knowledge accumulated over the generations, though you'll need to speak with a Tender for access, as some of these texts are reserved for experienced members of their order.

## CITY GUILDS

Life in Alderheart couldn't happen without the various guilds keeping things moving. Some guilds only wield power within the city, while others have offices across Humblewood and beyond! Regardless of their size, guilds work to regulate quality and fairness in their professions. Unaffiliated artisans, by contrast, have a hard time in the city, as many are seen as untrustworthy by Alderites. Take it from me, the fee to keep your guild membership up to date is nothing compared to the hassle of having to find a gargantuan-sized spot to set up shop in the Market Plaza without it. There are too many guilds in Alderheart to cover each one here, but the following are the most influential.

## THE MERCHANT'S GUILD

Responsible for regulating trade within Alderheart, the Suppliers and Vendors of the Great Tree City are more commonly known among Alderites as the Merchant's Guild. They oversee the shops and market plazas within the Great Tree City, and make it difficult for con artists or smugglers to set up shop. They also keep a close eye on the movement of all trade goods into and out of the city, in partnership with the Cartwright's Guild. As a matter of practice, the guild keeps records of prices, based on supply and demand, obtained from merchants and suppliers to ensure fair and profitable trade.

While the Merchant's Guild is headquartered in the Canopy's Guild Quarter, it also has a large office located in the Trunk Market Plaza. This chapter was the guild's original headquarters, and was founded by the famed vulpin merchant Verl Sangrenard. The current head of the Merchant's Guild is Fauques Sangrenard, a distant ancestor of the founder. He is known for his devotion to Churan, the Amaranthine of fate and fortune, which he claims to be the cause of his success. Unsurprisingly, many say that that success has just as much to do with his noble family's status, which keeps the guild well-connected with the Canopy's upper class.

## THE COURIER'S GUILD

The Great Tree City runs on information, and if it weren't for Alderheart's couriers, that information wouldn't get anywhere. The Courier's Guild is an association of independent companies responsible for carrying messages back and forth across Alderheart and the Wood. Though these companies engage in friendly competition, they are unified under a single set of principles, chief of which is that their messages arrive on time, rain or shine.

The largest companies under the Courier's Guild hold contracts to ferry messages for specific organizations within the city, such as other guilds or even the Birdfolk Council. Smaller companies, however, tend to survive off odd jobs, personal requests, and dealings with smaller groups in the city.

The three largest companies in Alderheart are the most well known and handle the city's biggest jobs.



## ***The Swift Gale Courier Co.***

One of the best known of the Courier's Guild's companies, Swift Gale Couriers are a common sight in the city, often darting to and fro with letters and missives to deliver. The Swift Gale is the oldest and most traditionally-minded company in the Guild. The company traces its history back to before the Courier's Guild, and was operating as a postal service even beyond the founding of Alderheart! They pride themselves on their dedication, and it's often said that, whether it's a recipe for seedcake or a declaration of war, the Swift Gales will treat it with the same dignity. Their unswerving commitment is likely why they serve as the official messengers of the Birdfolk Council. Their agents are an important part of the communication network in Humblewood, and they have been trusted to carry the Council's most confidential missives. Their couriers can be easily identified, as they all wear a leather scroll case strapped to one leg. Although many use messenger bags to carry their letters, the case is a symbol of their company, and some couriers choose to carry missives inside it.

## ***Flixen Twigs Post***

While not quite as established as the Swift Gales, Flixen Twigs Post isn't far behind in reputation, as it's the second oldest company still operating under the Courier's Guild. Said to be named after their founder, a legendary Bramblewellian jerbeen, they share the massive task of delivering mail in Alderheart with the Swift Gales, and they also offer up parcel delivery services for an extra fee. Where the Gales earn business based on their storied history and traditions, the couriers of Flixen Twigs are known as canny folks who get the job done without needing to resort to frills and frippery. They train specially in woodland survival and navigation, and are therefore the couriers of choice for delivering packages to remote woodland villages.

## ***Featherflight Deliveries***

Another well-known courier company in Alderheart is Featherflight Deliveries. This company is more rough-and-tumble than the others. Their primary contract is with the Perch Guard, requiring they convey communications and orders between stations across the Wood. Because of this, the two organizations work closely together, and Perch Guard soldiers routinely train Featherflight couriers in combat and how to move swiftly in heavier armor. Featherflight tends to hire couriers with previous combat experience.

## **THE SMITH'S GUILD**

Better known as the Smith's Guild, the Guild of Bellowworkers, Metallurgists, and Smiths is an association of metalworkers headquartered in the lower part of the Trunk. In the beginning, the guild only admitted metalsmiths, but it soon joined forces with guilds for related tradespeople like refiners, bellow's workers, and smelters. The Smith's Guild controls most of the city's metalworking, ore processing, and coal production. Though the Merchant's Guild may be the wealthiest in the city, members of the Smith's Guild often

proudly boast that their Goldsmiths mint Alderheart's coins, from gold ingots smelted by guild members, no less! A separate Miner's Guild is responsible for extracting the ore from mines around The Crest, and the two guilds keep close ties.

## **THE FORTUNE SEEKERS**

Alderheart's chapter of the Everden-spanning guild of adventurers and explorers, known as the Fortune Seekers, is the largest and best-equipped in Humblewood. This is where many aspiring adventurers get their first start! The guild caters both to hobbyists and experts, and the Fortune Seekers accept membership from folks of all sorts. They provide support for their members with resources like maps, basic traveling supplies, and information, all for the cost of their monthly dues. Additionally, their headquarters are staffed with veterans of the adventuring life who've since settled down. These hardened folks can point inexperienced adventurers to the best places to learn how to swing a blade, or to buy new gear in the city. The Merchant's Guild has close ties with the Fortune Seekers, as budding adventurers can earn good coin traveling with merchant wagons to protect their cargo.

As a Fortune Seeker myself, I keep in touch when I'm in town, though my home chapter is back in Firnveldt. The guild has its ears to the ground when it comes to what's going on in the Wood, and they regularly post bills to the guild board for tasks in need of capable adventurers.

## **THE CARTWRIGHT'S GUILD**

Formally known as The Cartwrights and Companions of Alderheart, but known throughout the city as the Cartwright's Guild, this association keeps the wheels of Alderheart running, literally! More than just simple wheelwrights and repairfolk, the Cartwright's Guild partners with various organizations across the city, including the Merchant's Guild, to help determine trade routes and to oversee the proper treatment of draught animals. Those who treat their animals poorly risk having their membership revoked and being blacklisted by the guild, which entails a refusal of service at any guild-approved workshop. Many members also have ties with the Inventor's Guild, especially mapach cartwrights, who seek to improve cart designs with innovations gleaned through their scroungecraft.

## **THE SHAPER'S GUILD**

One of the most important organizations in the city, the Speakers of the First Tree, often called the Shaper's Guild or simply "The Speakers," are responsible for all tree-shaping performed in the city. I'm told the name of their organization harkens back to the mythical seed gifted by the Amaranthine, from which the first Evertree was said to have sprouted. A few even believe that tree to be Alderheart, but it's hard to prove if this is true.

The Shaper's Guild trains and hires most shapers in the city, and they take it upon themselves to ensure that any tree-shaping done follows Alderheart's will and fits within the City Charter's provisions. The Shaper's Guild also has close ties with the Tenders. Both groups are practitioners of druidic

magic, and oftentimes folks in the city have a hard time telling the difference. If you look close, the Tenders' robes are a little more green, and usually have their order's symbol somewhere on them.

## THE INVENTOR'S GUILD

The Illustrious Guild of Imaginative Fabricators, better known as the Inventor's Guild, is an association of tinkerers and innovators founded by Edwin Ebonheart and his partner, Geswick Switch. In addition to being the city's leading authority on cogwork mechanics, it supports scholars and artificers of all sorts with its generous research fund. Members that have an idea worth exploring can apply for the fund, and might find their research fully sponsored by the guild. This has led to numerous innovations, most recently cogwork prosthetics made from wood and metal. The Inventor's Guild has strong ties to the local mapach community, and it often helps them to fund and organize scroungecraft fairs. It also works closely with both the Smith's Guild and the Cartwright's Guild. The Smiths provide deals on useful materials, such as metal for machine parts, while the Cartwrights are usually willing to invest in designs for lighter and more durable vehicles.

## GORMAND'S GUILD

More often called the Gourmand's Guild, The Great Tree Gourmand Society in Alderheart employs not only culinarians but also owners of fine eateries, cookeries, and public houses throughout the city. The guild prides itself on its dedication to the joy of both preparing and eating food, and its members publish free chapbooks about the best dining of the season around the city.

Once, the guild was famed as being made of impartial reviewers, and these chapbooks could be found recommending good food anywhere in the city, even little-known eateries in the Trunk and Roots, or quaint little taverns on the Canopy's side streets. Last I checked, though, the guild has had a change in leadership, and the only places that saw favorable reviews were expensive eateries in the Canopy. When it comes to food in the city, I've found just as much to love off the beaten path. Don't be afraid to try new things, whether from an eatery or a street cart!



Mapach Scroungecrafters

## ALDERHEART'S CURRENCY

The standard for coinage throughout Humblewood are the pieces of gold, silver, and copper minted in the Bank of Alderheart. These coins can easily be recognized by their design of the great Evertree on one side, and an acorn representing Alderheart's seed on the other. If you wish to exchange your currency, you can visit the Bank of Alderheart in the Canopy Plaza, though folks around the Wood are usually willing to accept other coins of similar weight in gold, silver, and copper. I keep a merchant's scale handy for just such occasions! And don't you even think about trying to pass off counterfeit coins, as any merchant worth their salt will figure you out quicker than a coldsnap!

Though considered uncouth by well-to-do Alderites, among the city's common folk the local currency has acquired many names rooted in Alderheart's rich history. Currency in general is known as "koyen," and comes from the word "coin." You might hear folks in the city say that someone "doesn't have the koyen" to pay for something or that they have "koyen enough to bend the boughs," meaning the person is very wealthy.

Gold coins are known as allers, which comes from the "alder" in "Alderheart," depicted on each coin's back. Silver coins are called grifs, and the slang here comes from when Alderheart took in those left homeless by the Great Calamity. Five silver pieces were given out to each family to start their new life, but these so-called "gifts of the city," resulted in merchants raising their prices, ensuring that they would be quickly spent. This led to silver coins being mockingly called "grifts of the city" or just "grifts", a name which stuck, though the "t" was eventually dropped.

Copper coins are called darns. This slang comes from a phrase popular in the Roots back when they were newly legitimized. Rumor was that all kinds of smuggling and illegal trade was enriching folks in Alderheart's high society, or, as the saying went, "It's koyen that darns the gap between Canopy and Roots!"

## TAXES

Folks in Alderheart are expected to pay taxes in exchange for city services. Household taxes are the most common, of course, and ensure that the city can afford to cover branchroad maintenance, keep the Perch Guard fed and equipped, and fix any damages that might occur during a sudden storm. As a visitor to the city, here are some taxes you might want to keep in mind.

**Market Stall Rental.** 5 allers per day gets you a decent spot in the market, but less crowded spots can go for as low as 1 aller.

**Legal Fines.** These fees are incurred as part of any legal defense you might have in the city. They range from 5 to 50 allers, and are often covered if you win your case. Let's hope it doesn't come to that though.

**Lift Charges.** The so-called "pulley fee." If you want to use any people-carrying lifts in the city it'll cost 5 darns. These fees can go up to 1 aller for freight lifts designed to ferry heavy cargo up the tree. This charge serves to keep the lifts in order,

as well as to pay the laborers who make them work.

**Gate Tax.** This stipend is charged to merchants or other folks headed into town with a cart or wagon of cargo. It's pretty small, ranging from 2 to 10 grifs based on how much you're carrying, and it goes towards maintaining the gates.

## TRAVEL AROUND ALDERHEART

There are many ways to get around in the Great Tree City, and while these may seem common to Alderites, folks visiting Alderheart for the first time often have difficulty finding the correct ways to get around.

## THE BRANCHROADS

Most of the travel around Alderheart uses pathways shaped from the Evertree itself. These are known throughout the city as "branchroads." Alderites actually use the word branchroad to refer to all pathways in the city, even those not shaped out of branches. This is likely because all of the branchroads connect to one another, even down into the tunnels and pathways in the Trunk and Roots.

Alderheart is a major trade hub, and you'll often see beasts of burden carrying carts of goods along the branchroads. These can include giant lizards, trained dire wolves, and horn-beetles. While most branchroads allow for foot traffic as well as carts and wagons, some are used exclusively for one or the other. This is especially true along the fringes of the Canopy level, where branchroads can't bear too much weight. All of the branchroads in the city connect in some way to a wide branchroad known as The Mainstay, which winds down the Canopy and into the lower Trunk. This is the main way folks get around in the city, and many paths diverge from it.

## REGULATIONS AND CUSTOMS

Since a lot of travel in Alderheart involves moving up or down, you might think that birdfolk would be using their feathered arms to glide everywhere. In truth, this kind of activity is frowned upon in most of the city. If you see a way to move up or down in Alderheart, be it a stairway, a sloping branchroad, or a pulley-powered lift, it's considered rude not to use it. In some places, signage might prohibit other means of gaining elevation. This isn't to say that gliding is prohibited! It's simply a matter of location. Gliding platforms abound in the city's Canopy level, and wherever you see the correct signage, you're free to move as you please. Gliding around outside of the authorized spaces is dangerous though. Besides the risk of two unsuspecting gliders crashing into each other, airspace in some parts of the city is reserved by the Perch Guard for emergencies.

Being able to truly fly is a rare and magical gift, but in the city, flight is similarly regulated for safety reasons. Many Perch Guards are equipped with potions of flying, and are allowed to use them in emergencies, but for most folks, flying is prohibited without a special license from either the Captain of the Guard or the city's Magistrate.

## ENTRY AND EXIT

There are only a few authorized ways to enter and exit the Great Tree City. Though there are a few different stairways and corkscrew tunnels leading up from the forest floor, these all funnel up towards large gates in Alderheart's Canopy. The most common of these stairways can be found in the entry junction, a large hollow in the base of the tree, from which a traveler can travel down to the Roots, up to the Trunk, or up higher still to the Canopy. These passageways serve as thoroughfares into the city, and act as security checkpoints for each city level.

The five great gates around the Canopy serve as the most recognizable entry points into the city. These structures are shaped like archways, and are flanked by Perch Guard watch posts, but today, these gates are more symbolic than defensive. Many were damaged by the First Coalition during the Battle of Alderheart, and are now regarded as testaments to Alderheart's resistance against the forces of chaos and banditry in the Wood. These gates all sit near the edge of the Canopy, and their placement allows guards to overlook the Wood below, as well as the freight lifts and pulley systems located nearby. The gates are a sight to behold at sunrise, when they are a bustle with new arrivals, and are some of the city's most distinctive landmarks.

## GETTING AROUND

The most common ways to get around the city may be the branchroads, but stairways, pulley lifts, and ladders are often used to provide folks with access to higher points in the city. This is especially true in the Canopy. A few freight and personnel lifts exist in the middle to upper levels of the Trunk. These are used to quickly travel to the Canopy or higher levels within the Trunk. Some private lifts have been built exclusively for use by citizens who can afford them, but most are large, centrally-located public lifts.

For personal travel, rickshaws, gigs, and well-groomed mounts are available to carry passengers throughout the city in select areas. If you're looking to make an impression in the Canopy, nothing says style to Alderites like paying to arrive in an elegant carriage.



# The Three Levels

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From the upscale avenues of the Canopy, to the mean streets of the Roots and the cozy interior of the Trunk, the Great Tree City has something for everyone. Each level contains districts with their own histories and attractions, as well as their own unique sights. You haven't truly experienced the city of Alderheart until you've seen all it has to offer.

## CANOPY

The Canopy of the Great Tree City is perhaps the most marvellous of Alderheart's three levels. Located at the very top of the city, both in its position and prominence, the Canopy is the place most folks think of when they picture Alderheart. Most who travel to Alderheart, either for business or tourism, are headed here. When walking along the wide, sculpted branchroads in this part of the city, it's easy to forget how high up you are, until you arrive at one of the Canopy's famed vistas. Most of the central tree is so wide that there's little risk of falling, though in areas where this isn't the case, stabilizing platforms and walkways ensure that folks are safe, even when the wind whips through the branches. As the first area to be inhabited, the Canopy is the most historic level of Alderheart, and some of the buildings and districts there trace their history back to the city's founding.

Life up here is made possible by a wondrous system of rain catchers. Water from the overstory is collected and stored, and then funnelled to pump stations throughout the Canopy. These remarkable "sky wells" allow for the top of the tree to get by without reliance on sources of groundwater. These apparatuses are even fitted with special stoves that catch and melt snow in the winter!

## CITY GATES

The five gates around the Canopy act as checkpoints, and are the only way to get in or out of the Canopy without running afoul of the Perch Guard. Each gate connects to stairways that wind up through tunnels from the ground level, and the tunnels have smaller checkpoints which let folks in or out at different levels in the Trunk.

While these stairways are reserved for foot traffic, the most well-used gates have freight lifts and pulleys to help travelers arriving with carts and wagons up to the Canopy. The five gates are listed below in the order in which they were built.

### *The Bastion*

The Bastion is the grandest and most stately gate, and is the only one made completely of stone. The great gate is a magnificent sight, its towering bulk held in place by rootlike supports shaped from the living tree. It was one of two gates, the other being the Patchwork, originally built to defend the most vulnerable access points of Alderheart against the forces of the First Bandit Coalition in the famous Battle of Alderheart. Though it was breached in this battle, it has since been faithfully reconstructed. The Bastion became a model for

the system of checkpoints used today to protect the city from smugglers. Now, it stands as a grand monument to the success of the city, and as a testament to Alderheart's victory over the forces of brigandry in the Wood.

Positioned on the south side of the tree, the gate is located at the end of a great road which splits at the town of Winnowing Reach and stretches west across the mountains and south to Saltar's Port. The Bastion sees the most traffic of the five gates. From foreign merchants to local visitors, hundreds of travelers pass through it on foot each day. Perch Guard soldiers keep watch from their battlements, ready to intervene at any sign of trouble.

### *The Patchwork*

The most unique gate in the city, the Patchwork gate is made from brick and mortar reinforced with an assortment of different materials, including wooden boards, metal plates, and lashings of thick rope. Built alongside the Bastion to protect the fledgling city from the First Coalition's assault, it is known as "the ugliest gate in Alderheart." I'm told the moniker is a term of endearment for the old gate, which was badly damaged by the siege weapons used in the battle. Many songs have been written about the Patchwork, the gate that wouldn't fall, and it has become a symbol of the resilience of those who came to Alderheart after their homes were destroyed. The Patchwork is located on the Evertree's southeast side, and though it used to handle foot traffic, the Patchwork now deals only with carts carrying freight and goods. Normally, this is the gate of choice for farmers and suppliers laden with goods from the perch of Brackenmill, as well as those carrying potions and books from the Avium.

### *The Wealdway*

The Wealdway was originally shaped out of Alderheart in Song 486, after the events of the Great Calamity. It serves as Alderheart's door to the Scorched Grove. Located on the Evertree's west side, it was meant as an entry point for villagers fleeing the destruction of their homes in the Calamity's wake. The gate is staffed by a small team of laborers, with lifts designed for smaller hand-pulled carts and wagons, rather than those used by merchant caravans. The gate can handle both freight and foot traffic, but it mainly sees use by folks who travel light. Anyone laden with too much cargo is directed south toward the Bastion. These days, the gate is mainly used by Tenders journeying to and from the Scorched Grove and its surrounding areas.

### *The Welcomeway*

On the east side of the tree is the Welcomeway, the second gate after the Wealdway to be completely shaped out of the Evertree. Its name comes from the fact that it was made to welcome folks coming on foot to the city from the eastern roadways, and its creation marked the transition of the Patchwork into a freight-only entrance. Seen as the most



*The Boughs*

modern gate, the Welcomeway has received a lot of care and maintenance over the years. Both its pleasing appearance and ease of use have earned the Welcomeway its nickname as “The Friendly Gate” among Alderites. Though it mainly handles foot traffic, the Welcomeway hosts innovative hand-operated lifts. Though only suitable for smaller cargo, travelers can operate them from the lift platform itself, a great convenience for those in a hurry. In addition, the Welcomeway sports a few reinforced pulley lifts, crewed by teams in the canopy, to handle heavy loads. Operators at the Patchwork can direct freight towards these lifts when their gate is too busy, which helps reduce traffic and ensure easy access to the city’s upper level.

### ***The Brambles***

The last gate to be created, the Brambles is the smallest of the city gates, and it was shaped just 70 years ago on the northwest side of the tree. You could be forgiven for thinking the Brambles is older than the Welcomeway, as this unassuming gate hasn’t seen an update since its creation. The Brambles is named as much for its remoteness as for its proximity to the ruins of the old village of Bramblewell, which it overlooks. The gate was designed as an access point for those living in smaller villages in the more remote parts of the Wood to the north of Alderheart. It is mainly equipped to handle foot traffic, with small freight lifts suitable only for large hand carts. It sees the least amount of use out of all the city gates, but is still a welcome sight for those coming in from the wild Wood.

### **BOUGHS DISTRICT**

One of the most scenic districts in the whole of the Canopy, the Boughs has a rich history. The founder Hevod Sunspring originally designed the area, but it has since been expanded upon by its residents. Though many of the original structures have since been renovated, some stand to this day. From its creator’s humble vision of a simple yet refined residential district, the Boughs has since grown into a collection of opulent homes and gardens, erected around some of the most beautiful parks in the city. Shaping magic was employed here to create patches of branch and foliage reminiscent of bushes, hedgerows, and even small trees. These parks are also filled with flowering vines and other plants that grow naturally on the Evertree.

### ***Mainstay Manors***

The Mainstay winds through the Boughs district, and on either side of it you’ll be able to see some of the largest and most architecturally unique homes in the city. Shaping in this part of the tree is minimal, as many of the foundations were built before the Battle of Alderheart. In the rare instances where shaping is used, it’s mostly for support structures. While some homeowners have claimed that less shaping is “better for the Evertree”, others have decried such claims as nothing more than an excuse to build ever bigger and more extravagant homes. Believe what you will, but I have it on good authority that some of the most interesting manors were built

just to show up the neighbors. The most influential nobles in Alderheart have estates here, including the Ebonharts, the Windswefts, the Jonquils, and the Saltars.

### **Boughs Gardens**

These fabulous gardens were first imagined by Hevod Sunspring to be enjoyed by all, and many have since been reshaped, updated, and expanded. Though, rather than being maintained by the city, their upkeep is now funded almost entirely by donations from the wealthy folks who live in the district. As such, these beautiful spaces are often gated off by nobles for exclusive open-air parties. You may get some unwelcome stares from passersby if you visit the gardens when they're open to the public, especially if you've been traveling the Wood and sleeping in tents for a measure, but you shouldn't pay them any mind. After all, it was the will of the founders that everyone should enjoy the gardens' splendors!

There are three main garden areas in The Boughs: The Panfloria, the Alderwood Gardens, and the Gracelia. The Panfloria is the largest, and contains vines with flowers from across the Wood, including some from the perches of each of the five original birdfolk clans. The Alderwood Gardens is the smallest of the three and contains flora native to the Evertree. This garden is the best expression of Hevod's love for nature, and it is used to teach younglings about Alderheart's unique ecosystem. Last, but not least, the Gracelia showcases the beauty of tree shaping and contains a hedge maze with a statue of Hevod at its center. Carpets of moss grow here, and footpaths have been molded between the paths to create stunning plazas, quiet trails, and skyfront promenades. Said to be the most stately of the three gardens, the Gracelia is a common site for galas and parties. Despite their updates, each garden retains the layout devised by Hevod, and their many pathways are sure to delight visitors, especially in the summertime when the flowers are at their most fragrant.

### **Observatories**

Three great observatories lie nestled in the branches above the Canopy level. Their construction began shortly after the Battle of Alderhart, and was completed in Song 427, making them the highest structures in the city to this day. These unique buildings were designed by the famous duo of founders, Edwin Ebonhart, the corvum archwizard, and his life partner and fellow inventor, the genius mapach Geswick Switch. Their construction is remarkably solid; each one was reinforced with a combination of tree-shaping magic and stabilization platforms, which has kept them rooted in place through the centuries, despite the Evertree growing and shifting. Records show that the construction was so solid that one of the observatories survived being struck by a bolt of lightning back in Song 536, which was so fierce it nearly sheared off the main branch holding it in place. Records say it was the reinforced supports that kept the observatory standing as the tree was mended and the blaze quelled.

These observatories form a rough triangle around the overstory, and have three main uses: they help sky watch-

ers read the clouds to predict weather patterns, they provide astronomers with a tool to identify and predict events of cosmic importance, and their massive telescopes can be turned to the surrounding forest so that the Perch Guard can identify distant threats to the Wood, such as looming natural disasters. Perch Guard lookouts share each observatory's space with the scholars who live and work there, and they have sending spells to quickly report danger to their commanding officer.

### **BRANCHES DISTRICT**

Proof that not every Canopy-dweller lives in the lap of luxury, the Branches District was built up around the affluent Canopy center by less well-off birdfolk who sought opportunity in Alderheart. The Branches District is incredibly large and fragmented into smaller communities. Each one is established in parts of the tree deemed too wild or too dangerous to build on.

The buildings in the Branches are generally well constructed, if quaint when compared to the manor homes and extravagant shops found in the Canopy's interior. They



are made from irregular stones held together with mortar, lumber lashed solidly with tough rope, or twigs woven together into a kind of round nest. Tree shaping is rare in the Branches since there just isn't enough tree to shape large homes, though sometimes you'll see it used to help anchor buildings or provide additional support.

Branchroads out here have been shaped together from many of Aldrheart's thinner branches, and supporting structures, such as rope bridges, ladders, and wooden platforms, help to provide extra walking surface. Folks aren't in any danger of falling off in most parts of the Branches, but even in these areas you'll see warning signs and blockades keeping pedestrians away from dangerous areas.

### ***Eldrow Street***

The Branches District is connected by Eldrow Street, a major branchroad that winds its way through the interior of the entire district and encircles the Evertree. Eldrow Street is connected to the Mainstay and its nearby streets through small branchways and wooden bridges which lead to and from the interior. The best shops and places to live in the Branches can be found along Eldrow Street, where they are nestled a comfortable distance from the extreme edges of the Evertree. Not all folks can be so lucky as to live here though.

### ***The Fall***

Many believe that only birdfolk can live in the Branches, but a few humblefolk do make their homes here. The one notable exception is the Fall. So named by Alderites, this community is in a section of the Branches that is sparse even compared to other parts of the district. Here, homes and shops hang on the edge of the Evertree and are connected to safer zones by bridges and thin branchroads. Over this edge lies a straight drop down to the forest. The Fall doesn't have room for many of the safety measures found elsewhere, though nets strung across the bottom of the most precarious perches offer a little protection.

## **COUNCIL PLAZA**

Located above the Canopy Market, the Council Plaza is home to many of Alderhart's most famous landmarks. The whole plaza is arranged around a statue named "The First Speaker", depicting the eponymous founder Ava Windsweft holding the writ that formed the Birdfolk Council. This statue is often sought out by visitors to the city, and historical plays are performed in front of it during the Founder's Day holiday.

### ***The Council Chambers***

The plaza is named for the Birdfolk Council Chambers, a grand domed building unlike anything else in the city, which rises in gleaming splendor from the north end of the plaza. Flanked on either side by standards bearing the crest of every perch that has a seat on the Council, this building is where the Birdfolk Council holds court, and it often has a line of visitors. If you're looking for an audience with the Council, be prepared to wait unless you have a special writ. If you're interested in seeing how the Council works, the Council Chambers has a viewing area where some of their proceedings are open to the citizenry. The city offers guided tours of the Chambers

itself when the Council is not in session.

### ***Law and Order***

In addition to being the seat of the Birdfolk Council, the Council Plaza is also where you can find many of the city's legal buildings. The headquarters of the Perch Guard, where the Captain of the Guard oversees Perch Guard operations for the city and the Wood, is located here. In addition to being a bureaucratic office, it also has a large barracks for its soldiers, as well as a training ground for new recruits. Those who stay in the barracks are stationed for Alderheart's defense and are ready to leap into battle at a moment's notice. Those who work as part of the City Watch live amongst the citizenry when not on duty.

Next to the Perch Guard headquarters you'll find a rough hewn-stone building, Alderheart's prison. Originally built for First Coalition brigands, the prison still holds the worst criminals of the Wood. Though, with the move to measures of restorative justice, a portion of the prison has been converted into a gaol. There, the accused are held temporarily while they await trial before the court, and are more often than not remanded into City Watch custody to oversee reparations.

The historic Courthouse, a grand building of wood and marble, is also in this area. Disputes between citizens are settled here daily by Alderheart's judges. The office of the Magistrate is also located in the courthouse.

### ***The Heart of the City***

Many of the city's public services can also be found here in the Council Plaza. Within sight of the Perch Guard Headquarters is the First Bank of Alderheart, where all of Humblewood's coins are minted. Many businesses also keep their coin safe in the bank's impressive vault. For travelers, the bank contains a moneychanger's office which can exchange most currency for darns, grifs, and allers. Additionally, the office of the Swift Gales Courier Company can be found in the Plaza, as it serves as the main post office for the city. They also send messages across the sea, so look them up if you wish to send regards back to your homeland!

## **GUILD QUARTER**

Following The Mainstay down from the Canopy Market will lead you to Alderheart's Guild Quarter, which lies near the center of the Canopy level. When this part of the city was shaped, about a century after Alderheart's founding, several city guilds relocated their headquarters here, creating a central location for mercantile dealings. The headquarters of the Cartwright's Guild, the Fortune Seekers, The Gourmand's Guild, the Merchant's Guild, and the principal headquarters of the Courier's Guild are all within sight of one another. Travelers looking for eateries and quality taverns can also find them here, as many have cropped up to serve the local guild members. Some of these taverns also serve as inns with room and board, owing to the many Merchant's Guild members and Fortune Seekers who travel to Alderheart.



#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE CANOPY

I prefer to stay in the Trunk where it's a little more cozy, but not many places there have stables big enough for Bello. I often end up staying at The Feather's Friend inn and tavern while I'm in town. It's not the fanciest place in the city, but if you're looking for modest accommodations at a fair price, you won't find a better deal in the Canopy level!

### TEMPLE QUARTER

To the north of the canopy, just on the other side of the Market plaza, lies the temple quarter. One of the oldest districts in Alderheart, the temple quarter was established around Holybranch, the grand temple to the Amaranthine that was erected by the Evertree's first inhabitants. Acolytes travel from across the Wood to learn from the priests who teach there, and Alderites visit it regularly for religious guidance.

Unlike some of the older temples in the Temple Quarter, many of which have been converted into houses, Holybranch was re-shaped and expanded shortly after Alderheart's founding. The massive structure of wood and stained glass took nearly half a century to complete, as it was built as a monument to the common piety of both humblefolk and birdfolk. Each of the twelve windows which surround the main building depict the holy symbol of a different Amaranthine. Though the original temple only showcased birdfolk Amaranthine, it was updated during its expansion to represent humblfolk Amaranthine as well. Inside, altars to each Amaranthine allow for offerings to be made, and priests perform daily rituals to honor the keepers of the Great Rhythm. At first I couldn't wrap my horns around it, but after attending a congregation, I found that the tales told by the priests here weren't much different from the ones told by the elders back home.

It just goes to show, the folks around here might worship them a little differently than you or me, but Amaranthine are Amaranthine wherever you go. Even if you don't recognize some of the names in a birdfolk temple, I'd advise you to be polite, and show proper respect to the great spirits that watch over us all.

### CANOPY MARKET

In the center of Alderheart, you can find the Canopy's Market district. This district's most notable feature is its grand, open courtyard of stalls, tents, and tables, run by hawkers of all sorts. The marketplace also hosts rows of established shops, some of which date back to the Founding as respected purveyors of goods. From adventuring gear or equipment, to fashions and fine foods, you'll find whatever you need in the Canopy Market. The shops generally cater to those with koyen to spend, stocking fine and expensive wares imported from across Everden.

You'll find a bargain here every so often, and those in the know look for deals along the district's fringes and in the side alleys, where less reputable merchants set up their shops. This

isn't without risk, and many a bargain hunter has found themselves taken in by a huckster. Should you uncover anything unsavory, be sure to report it quickly. The area is carefully watched by the Perch Guard, and while you won't have trouble locating a guard, you might return to find that the crook has already packed up and left!

Aside from the hustle and bustle of the markets, this district also contains a few homes and public parks. Just off The Mainstay towards the Boughs district, you'll find a park that contains one of the city's most picturesque landmarks: a statue known as "True Courage". It depicts Gaspard, the Amaranthine of valor, before his ascendance, overcoming a trial given by the monstrous Amaranthine Kren. The parable is an old tale commonly told among humblefolk in the city to ward off fear. It might not be as grand as some of the other statues you're likely to see in the city, but there's a small stone bench opposite the statue that provides an enchanting view of summer sunsets.

### TRUNK

The Trunk of Alderheart is the biggest of the three levels, and home to most of the city's residences. It is a cozy and welcoming place, and while it may not have the extravagance of the Canopy, it's not without its marvels. Despite being mostly located inside the Evertree, the Trunk level is surprisingly well lit. Sunlight pours in through natural knotholes and shaped portholes, and in places where this isn't possible, strings of lanterns lit by motes of magic or domesticated brightbeetles illuminate the branchroads.

Unlike the skywells which provide water for the Canopy, waterways shaped into the Trunk use the Evertree's natural channels and veins to draw water up from the Roots and funnel waste water back into the earth. Clean water from this system is funneled into wells throughout the Trunk, which can be accessed using hand pumps.

Nearly all of the homes here were shaped from the Evertree, though some areas have properties built from other materials.

### TRUNK MARKET

The Trunk Market is usually a newcomer's introduction to the Trunk as a whole. If you follow the Mainstay down from the Guild Quarter in the Canopy level, you'll eventually wind up in a great plaza of shops and stalls formed around a large, shaped pillar. This market is every bit as vertical as the Canopy's, as stairs from the shop-filled ground floor lead up into grand mezzanines, where tenement-style residences overlook the plaza. The dwellings here share the mezzanines with yet more shops and offices shaped into the tree, including auction houses and vendors of different local crafts. The whole place is lit by cold-lanterns, which glow with motes of magic that change their hue and intensity throughout the day.

The Trunk Market sees traffic on par with the Canopy Market, and Alderites usually shop at both. Knowing which market to visit to find the best deals on a given item is part of life in the city. Where the Canopy market is better suited to imported goods, adventuring gear, and equipment, the shops

here cater to niche goods and regional specialities from all across Humblewood. This is also the place to look for strange reagents, and other curiosities you're unlikely to find in the Canopy Market.

Besides being a bustling business hub with some of the most cosmopolitan living spaces in the Trunk, the market plaza also has its share of impressive sights. The illustrious hall of the age-old Shaper's Guild can be found on the second mezzanine level. It's instantly recognizable, thanks to the intricate shaping work on the entryway, which is made to look like a natural hollow in the Evertree. The offices of Flixen Twigs Post can be found here as well, in front of rows of lockboxes shaped into the tree.

On the floor of the market, in the north of the great plaza, you'll see the former headquarters of the Merchant's Guild, shaped here before their relocation to the Guild Quarter in the Canopy. Inside its spacious entryway, you'll find a statue of Lady Verl Sangrenard, the guild's founder. The statue, called simply "The Merchant", depicts her appraisal of the various currencies used in the Wood at the time using a scale. No doubt Lady Sangrenard needed to do exactly this in order to secure Alderheart's building materials. Though this hall no longer serves as the headquarters, it has become a local chapter for the guild, and it oversees the management of the Trunk Market.

Just a short distance off the main plaza on the ground level, you can find marvellous three-story manors that have been shaped from the Evertree. Here you'll see homes belonging to such illustrious families as the Sangrenards and the Forecombs.

If you follow the tunnels in the opposite direction leading towards the Warrens, you'll come across a large fungus grove in front of a root-like building shaped into the tunnel wall. This is the headquarters of the Tenders, who welcome any visitors. You can usually find acolytes tending to the fungus grove. Though it might seem odd to let fungus grow on the tree, the folks there say that these naturally occurring fungi provide the tree with important nutrients and help to ward off harmful kinds of fungi. The building behind the grove is a sort of lodging home for acolytes and traveling Tenders. It also apparently contains an archive, one of several the Tenders have spread throughout the Wood.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: BARGAIN HUNTING

When not selling my wares in the Trunk Market, I like to browse the selections on offer there. The Trunk always has a few eye-catching trinkets and stellar bargains to be found if you don't mind haggling. Last time I went shopping in the trunk, I found some basilisk crystals next to a stall which sold every ingredient I needed to make steppe rations, a favorite treat from my home in Firnveldt! I also found a portable jug shaped like a ram's horn, which I just had to buy!

## THE WARRENS

Follow the Mainstay down from the Trunk Markets and you'll find The Warrens, the largest residential district in the Trunk. This is what most Alderites think of when they picture Trunk-level living. As the name implies, this district is full of tunnels that branch off from the Mainstay. Some of these tunnels taper off into nothing, while others connect with each other or eventually return to the Mainstay. Most of the residences in the Trunk are located in The Warrens District, and depending on the street, they range from modest to poor. Being in the most central part of the tree, much of the light is provided by cold-lanterns, though some branchroads in this district are close enough to the tree's bark for windows and portholes.

### *The Wend*

The Wend is a prominent branchroad in the Tunnels that cuts through the Mainstay in The Warrens District. Much like the larger branchroads common to the Trunk, it weaves its way back and forth through the Mainstay as the route descends, cutting through other streets in the process, and branching into pathways that lead to other streets, common homes, and sometimes dead ends. To folks who don't live here, this branchroad can be a maze, so be sure to purchase a map from the Trunk Market if you need to navigate it, and pay close attention to the strings of cold-lanterns and signposts you come across. If you like, you can always spend a few hours just letting yourself get lost walking the streets. After all, there's no better way to learn about a city!

### *Mainstay Residences*

The Mainstay bores through The Warrens in a wide corkscrew pattern, and many homes are located along it. Residences on the Mainstay are considered to be the gold standard in this district, and folks here are willing to put up with the traffic that comes from living along such a busy route for the access it provides to the Canopy and the Trunk Market, each of which can be reached by simply walking up the path. The traffic also allows for small businesses to thrive, including taverns, home-operated tailors, tinkerers, iron-smiths, and wheelwrights.



#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: THE WOODEN FLAGON

Should you be in the market for a cozy tavern with clean, modest rooms, hearty home-cooked meals, and some exceptionally well-crafted mead, head to the Wooden Flagon. This lovely spot just down the Mainstay from the Market Plaza is my pick for the best place to stay in the whole city. I rarely lodge there since I must make arrangements at a larger stable for Bello, but each time I've stayed has been a delight. If an old hen named Myrna Mistmeadow still runs the place, just tell her you're friends of Jonall, and ask for her latest homebrew! She normally doesn't sell her experimental batches to customers, but if you're willing to spend a silver or two you'll be pleasantly surprised.

### BRIGHT HOLLOWES

One of the most beautiful districts in the whole city, the Bright Hollowes begins at a branchroad known as the Golden Stair that splits off from the Mainstay, just a fifteen minute walk down from the Warrens. The Golden Stair winds around the south-facing side of the Evertree, close to the bark, before returning to link back up with the Mainstay about two hundred feet down from the Warrens. This part of the Evertree fought off a malignant infection at some point in Alderheart's long life. As a result, the wood is furrowed with knot holes and gaps which allow sunlight to shine through unimpeded, giving the Golden Stair its name. The Bright Hollowes District is made up of homes which lie along this branchroad and the streets that split off from it, including many built within a large hollow in the Evertree. A selection of these homes have also been built along the outside of the Trunk and are connected to the residences along the Golden Stair by specially fenced-in branchroads that wind out of the hollow and along the outside of the Evertree.

#### *The Shining Pool*

As you travel down the Golden Stair, you'll eventually find yourself in a great hollow which provides a breathtaking view of the forest. Here, a grand plaza has been established, where homes and small shops shaped from the tree's interior surround a great fountain. This magnificent fountain cascades into a large, clear pool that is beloved for its beauty and serenity. In the winter seasons, the pump which supplies the pool is switched off, and the water freezes over, transforming the pool into a small skating rink.

#### *Exterior Estates*

The most extraordinary part of the Bright Hollowes are the many residences found on the Evertree's exterior. These homes are well-built and luxurious, but have a charming coziness that you just don't find in the Canopy. They remind me of the cliffside homes in the mountain villages of my homeland. Because this part of the tree still bears scars of Alderheart's former infection, there isn't enough wood to shape into homes. Instead, residences here are made of cobblestones or clay on plots carefully shaped out of the bark. Many of these plots contain natural pockets, which have been filled with soil to

create gardens and flower patches. Though the homes here are still high up on the tree, the neighborhood was designed with humblefolk in mind, and everything here from the estates to the solid branchways are reinforced and fenced in for safety.

### MAKER'S WAY

As the Mainstay twines even farther downward, close to the base of the tree, you'll find that homes begin to look smaller, and a little more ramshackle. This district, known as the Maker's Way, is where many of Alderheart's manufacturers and craftspeople work. Occasionally, you can still see some interesting architecture, though most places here are designed for utility rather than comfort. Along the wide atrium which runs along the center of the district, you can find the halls of both the Inventor's Guild and the Smithing Guild. An ingenious collection of pipes and bellows made from metal sprawl in a tangle above from the guildhalls and stalls that line the passage. These pipes lead upwards, where shaping allows them to harmlessly snake through the living wood of the tree, directing potentially harmful vapors from manufacturing out of the Trunk. This system was concocted by the Inventor's Guild and has made it possible for manufacturers to safely set up shop so close to the Roots, where raw materials are mined from beneath the tree.

### ENTRY JUNCTION

Added less than a century ago, this large hollow was shaped out of the southwest side of the Evertree's base, and was made to both commemorate the city's founding and to provide another point of entry for folks that travel here on foot. The Entry Junction is a large, round plaza with vaulted ceilings and buildings shaped into the tree around it. From it, five branchroads spiral up toward the Canopy, each leading to one of the five gates. The Mainstay stops here before winding down into the Underfall, and those looking to take the long road up to the top, or to homes in the lower trunk, can pass through the Perch Gard checkpoint to begin their ascent. This checkpoint is also used by folks coming up from the Roots level.

The hollow opens in a dramatic archway into the plaza, where the floor is tiled with marble from the Crest. In the center, a large statue depicts a luma and a hedge holding hands in a peaceful slumber, slumped against a tree stump surrounded by flowers. This piece is known as "Dreamers in a Grove", and I'm told it's based on an old folktale about the Amaranthine Henwin granting traveling companions sleep in a peaceful vale. Though a departure from the original tale, the statue's subjects were chosen to emphasize both birdfolk and humblefolk in Alderheart's culture. Lanterns suspended by magic float around the ceiling and provide light during the evening. Everything about the Entry Junction is designed to awe newcomers, and it doesn't disappoint! This area of the city is something I go out of my way to visit, even though Bello and I have to take the freight lifts up at one of the gates.

Beyond its spectacle and usefulness to folks traveling on foot, the Entry Junction features many points of interest around the plaza. One of the most prominent is a decorative



Bright Hollows

two-story building that contains the Museum of Alderheart. The museum is first and foremost dedicated to showcasing the history of the city, but also covers great events that have taken place in Humblewood. Entry is one aller for a day, or a grif for a five hour pass. If you're interested in history, you owe it to yourself to visit.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: THE RUINS OF BRAMBLEWELL

The ruins of the old town of Bramblewell can still be found on the outside of the Evertree's northwest side, in the shadows of Alderheart's massive roots. Though the town was once prosperous, now there are only cobble-stone walls and dilapidated shells of buildings overgrown with vegetation. These ruins once contained valuable artifacts from the time before the city's founding, but most have been scavenged by bandits. The bits and pieces that remain have little value, and in some cases, were simply left by travelers sheltering as they passed by. Nevertheless, the ruins are a part of Alderheart's heritage, and some scholars still comb through the site looking for buried relics from the town's heyday. If you're looking to explore the ruins, do so during the day, as people say that thieves often use the site for clandestine dealings under cover of darkness.

## ROOTS

The newest part of the city, the Roots, was only legitimized by the Birdfolk Council in Song 703. It is home to the poorest inhabitants of the city, despite numerous plans and efforts to improve conditions. According to the folks who live here, these attempts have failed because the Council has simply pushed their plans onto the Roots' communities, without their partnership or consultation. The Roots communities may appear lacking when compared to the grand heights of The Canopy, but the folks here are kind, hearty, and spirited. They could thrive, if only the Council would listen and give them the resources they need to prosper.

The history of the Roots goes back almost a century before it was officially recognized, though its story hasn't been given nearly as much attention by scholars as the rest of Alderheart. Much of what we do know about the Roots' unique history comes from local folks who call themselves "grotkenners", storytellers who carry the oral traditions of Root-dwellers going back generations. Though many of these tales are couched in legend, they also contain nuggets of the Roots' lost history, dating back to its formation. The grotkenners are a crucial part of Roots culture and are key for anyone who wants to learn more about this part of the city's history.

Though the Perch Guard claim the Roots to be filled with organized crime, in this humble traveler's opinion, this is no more true here than it is anywhere else in the city. What crime does exist here is certainly more visible through pickpockets, con artists, and thieves, but those pushed into the criminal life are often desperate, and trying to survive by any means necessary. Many of the folks who live here hold honest work mining for precious minerals in some of the tunnels that wind

their way beneath the Evertree, run their own small stores and eateries, or pick up odd jobs in the Underfall District. If you keep your eyes open, you'll find that the Roots level has just as much to offer travelers as the rest of the city.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE: AMENITIES IN THE ROOTS

The Roots went a long time without access to city amenities of any sort, and were only fed into the same groundwater system that supplies the Trunk about two decades ago. Now, hand-pumped wells can be found throughout the level. Development has also brought cold lanterns to light the dark passageways. They are used here as much as in the Trunk, but the air in the Roots is filled with enough moisture that torches and candles can be used for light and warmth without risk of a fire.

## THE UNDERFALL

The Underfall is the largest and most central district in the Roots level, and it serves as a hub from which the other districts fan out, like spokes on a wheel. Branchroads like the Mainstay all stop here, giving way to tunnels called rootways, which are generally smaller than the tunnels in the Trunk level. Though they all eventually narrow, larger rootways host entire communities, whereas smaller rootways often form alleys or backstreets. Some of these smaller rootways also contain small homes, and can provide a number of useful shortcuts across the district to those who know their way around.

The Underfall plays host to a Perch Guard station, and though it is grand, you're far less likely to see Perch Guard officers patrolling the rootways. A large cathedral marked with the symbol of the Nightfather can be seen here as well. It houses the Roots' catacombs, where folks in the city come to pay respects to the dead buried within. It is maintained by a conclave of priests dedicated to Tyton, who oversee rites for those interred here.

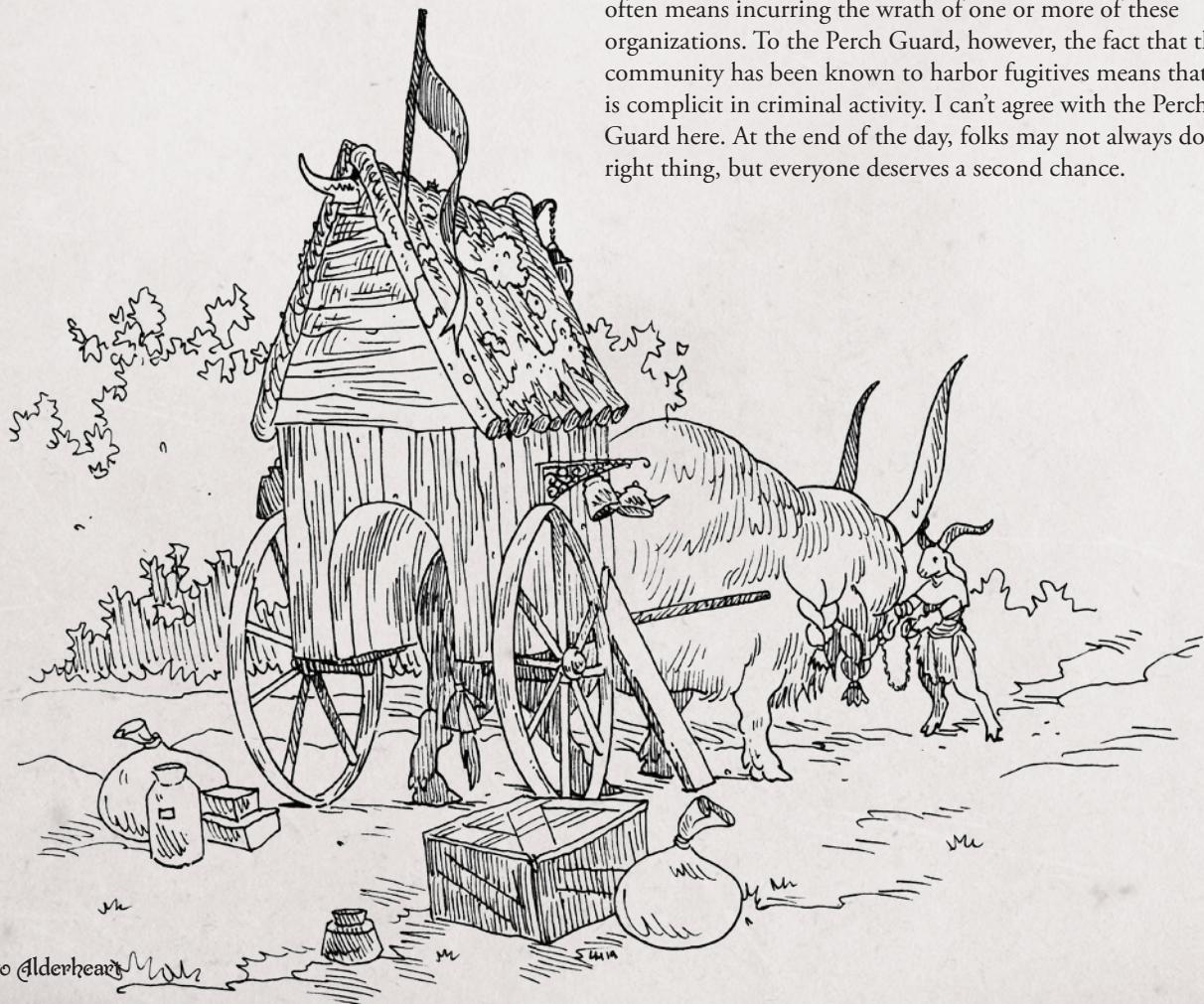
Around the central plaza of the Underfall, you can see many shops and store tents set up by merchants and business owners. Tailors, apothecaries, and vendors of different kicknacks and handicrafts can be found alongside inns and eateries that serve humble meals. The accommodations may not be the best, but the folks who run them put everything they have into their businesses, and they are a good choice for any traveler short on koyen.

## PESTLEHAVEN

One of the things you'll notice in the Roots, more so than in the Trunk, are beds of white, threadlike fungi. Called "threadgrass" by the locals, the fungi are harmless to the Evertree, and in fact form a symbiotic relationship with it. Though it resembles grass, threadgrass is actually the root of a long fungus that extends outside the tree. Colonies of these fungi help to dissolve the earth surrounding the Roots, allowing the tree to gain more nourishment from the soil. In Song 723, alchemists discovered that threadgrass is a useful reagent in healing tinctures and remedies, alleviating everything from stomach pain to headaches.

Fifty years ago, the district of Pestlehaven was established off a large rootway to the east of the Underfall in order to provide impoverished Root-dwellers with work through a community of fungus farms. While the project saw some initial success, scholars say that the increased production caused the fungus' price to drop rapidly, which in turn caused the farmers to see little return on their labor. After a few bad years, many farmers had to close down operations and the whole project began to collapse. Many plots were abandoned, and, after having been left unattended for decades, became overgrown, creating large fungal gardens. These gardens are havens for dangerous creatures and hazardous invasive fungi, which pose a risk to anyone traveling here. A few honest fungus farmers remain in Pestlehaven, but others have resorted to growing illicit fungi which can be made into poisons or other dangerous concoctions. Many farms were co-opted by local Thieves' Guilds, and the district has since gained an unearned reputation for being the home of criminal sorts. These numerous issues have earned the area its more derisive nickname: Pesthaven.

The poor state of Pestlehaven has attracted numerous Thieves' Guilds, and I'm told many come here to do business with some of the less reputable farmers and alchemists. Word also has it that the Bandit Coalition has a recruitment office down here, though I wouldn't know where. Apparently they've made quite an impression on locals, promising them a share of wealth they've been denied up to now, though Rhythm knows what kinds of nastiness they'd need to do to get it.



## ROOTBRAID

Take the rootway that leads north from the Underfall, and after a short walk you'll come across a bright, humble little neighborhood nestled within the Roots. The district of Rootbraid is no stranger to crime or poverty, but the people here form a tight-knit community that works to fight back against the unjust treatment afforded to the Roots. Made up mostly of residential homes, with a few small shops spread out through smaller rootways, the heart of Rootbraid lies in a town hall made from the lacquered carapaces of giant insects. This building is large, and has an iron bell atop a tower at its center. Here, residents meet regularly to discuss issues worth bringing to their official representative. Folks also hold community events, like dances and holiday celebrations, activities, games, and even educational lessons from Tenders, who teach the children about nature and which fungi is good to eat.

Rootbraid is a community respected by all in the Roots for the good work they do in educating folk without means to pay for tutors and agitating for better conditions for all Root-dwellers. Those who live here are known for their generosity, and readily share with each other and with any unfortunate Root-dwellers who may come around. The community does whatever it can to prevent folks from joining criminal organizations and helps those leaving find a way out. As such, it is known to shelter desperate folk on the run from the law. These acts of kindness have earned Rootbraid a position of respect among the Thieves' Guilds, many of whom take such pride in this community that causing trouble here often means incurring the wrath of one or more of these organizations. To the Perch Guard, however, the fact that the community has been known to harbor fugitives means that it is complicit in criminal activity. I can't agree with the Perch Guard here. At the end of the day, folks may not always do the right thing, but everyone deserves a second chance.

## CUTTER'S COIL

The lowest district in the city, Cutter's Coil is a winding rootway that spirals down into the deepest parts of the Roots level to unexplored cave systems, branching off into innumerable dark alleys and nooks along the way. Folks here live in homes made from packed and dried earth along the rootway, and besides dangerous jobs as miners or guides, work here is hard to come by. The coil gets its name from an intrepid jerbeen hunter named Cutter Quickwit who's tales of adventure in the deep caves below are recounted all over the Roots.

### Wilder Places

Not every place in the Roots level is inhabited by people, and in the deep darkness below Cutter's Coil, beds of fungus create little pockets of wilderness alongside tunnels that disappear into vast networks within the earth. These spaces are home to a variety of giant insect nymphs and other burrowing creatures. Though many of the tunnels have yet to be explored, they apparently contain creatures that have

lived here since long before birdfolk came to the tree, and it is considered only proper to let them be. The creatures can be dangerous, and while it's possible there are rare magical reagents and useful medicines within, rumors of monsters have kept the lowest reaches from being fully explored. There are no maps, and what's worse, minerals in the soil can make your compass useless in places. Nobody is sure how deep these tunnels actually go. Should you wish to plumb these depths, dear traveler, be sure you pack a good amount of supplies for your journey, and see if you can get a guide, if possible. I hear that more than a few would-be adventurers have gone into the tunnels without the expertise of a seasoned guide, never to be seen again.



Temple of the Amaranthine



Entry Junction

# Culture and Society

More than just a collection of districts, Alderheart is a vibrant cultural center within the Wood. The diversity of ideas, beliefs, and customs held by folks in the city have given rise to all kinds of celebrations, forms of cuisine, and other local traditions. While some of these are unique to the Great Tree City, others have spread throughout the Wood to become hallmarks of Humblewood culture.

## BIRTH & CHILDCARE

On account of the many birdfolk call Alderheart home, hatcheries are common throughout Alderheart. These communal nurseries, which are funded by the city, watch over the eggs of expectant birdfolk parents. The caretakers of these hatcheries, known as "sitters", provide nests of swaddling to keep birdfolk eggs at the right temperature until they hatch, and lend guidance to birdfolk parents-to-be. Even after their chick has been born, parents can bring their younglings back to the hatchery regularly to monitor their health. Some wealthier birdfolk hire midwives and incubate their eggs in special nests in their homes, though this is relatively rare.

The largest hatchery in Alderheart is The Community Cradle, just off of the Mainstay near the Trunk Market. The Cradle contains a nursery for newborn humblefolk as well, and it provides healing services for humblefolk and birdfolk of all ages.

While sitters are traditionally birdfolk, many humblefolk have begun to work as sitters in recent years, especially in the Trunk. It's sad to say that some birdfolk treat these skilled and kind healers with a shocking lack of respect, invoking notions of "egg-stealing." There's no need for such ignorance, though. Be sure you treat any sitter you see with respect, regardless of whether they're furred or feathered!

## FUNERALS

Though a common practice in most of Humblewood, the first birdfolk inhabitants of Alderheart believed that burying a body was improper, and had their own rituals to honor their dead. These ancient rites eventually became the "star burial", a practice which has endured to this day.

Performed under an open night sky, the ritual leader uses a spell to gradually dissolve the body of the deceased into dazzling motes of light, which gently drift upwards to the heavens. These sparkles are said to be the spirit of the deceased. Attendees offer prayers to the Nightfather, the Amaranthine Tyton, that he might keep his watchful gaze upon the deceased as they travel into the lands of death. Often, it is said that those who receive a star burial are reborn as stars in Tyton's sky. My people burn our dead on a funeral pyre, for we also believe that the spirit travels to the sky in death. Our sages say our ancestors return to speak to us through the mists that gather on the plains and in the mountains during the early frosts. We often seek wisdom from those who came before, and perhaps on clear, starry nights, some Alderites do too.

At first, only birdfolk observed star burials, but since the city's founding, the rite has been adopted by humblefolk as well. Star burials are seen by most Alderites as the proper way to honor the dead, but the ritual components are expensive, and not all citizens can afford them. For these folks, as well as citizens who wish to have their bodies interred, funeral services can instead conclude with the body being transported to the lower levels of the Roots, where the city's sprawling catacombs provide a space for the city's dead. These catacombs are watched over by priests of Tyton, who maintain the gravesites and guard against vandals.

Left: Julia Metzger

Lauren Henderson



## EDUCATION

Folks in Alderheart are passionate about education, and the city boasts several schoolhouses. These Council-funded centers provide basic early education for younglings, which is supplemented by additional learning at home from family members or paid tutors. This “nest tutoring”, as it’s called, is widespread among canopy-dwellers, especially those among Alderheart’s social elite, teaching everything from calligraphy to fencing.

Aside from basic education, the city guilds provide apprenticeship programs for those eager to learn a trade. Apprenticeship gives folks a leg-up in learning a profession, and serves as a gateway to official guild membership. For those looking to teach themselves, the city is also home to a number of quality libraries with books on every subject. It’s always a treat to visit and read about places I’ve never seen! Alderheart is also home to many private scholars, scribes, and mages who offer their services as tutors. Some folks coming to Alderheart seeking these mentors are chosen to continue their studies at The Avium. Others find that the connections they make through their teachers are enough to earn them positions as advisors throughout the city. Between apprenticeship and tutors, it’s no surprise that a good portion of folks who journey to the Great Tree City from the smaller woodland villages come in search of knowledge.

## HIGH SOCIETY

Membership in the highest spheres of Alderheart society is a rare privilege, which comes with the sort of power and prestige that average Alderites can only dream of. Folks who make it into Alderheart’s elite are called “nobles,” though they’re more accurately “aristocrats”, as Humblewood doesn’t have a monarch. Noble families in Alderheart are afforded respect due to positions their families held in times past, as well as the large donations they supply to favored city projects. These families benefit from a number of advantages, including leverage in business negotiations to having the benefit of the doubt with the authorities. Not all of Alderheart’s noble houses are equal in standing, and each tends to wield influence in different areas and with different guilds across the Wood. Make no mistake, however, each noble has enough leverage to improve your life, or make it rather difficult, indeed.

Nobles who can afford it hire a small personal guard to watch over their estate. Such forces are independent from the City Watch and wield more limited authority. Don’t let this fool you though; if a guard in the Boughs asks you to move along, you’d best do as they say, or risk having the Perch Guard called in to escort you from the premises.

## PROMINENT LINEAGES

These families represent a few of the most powerful and influential names in Alderheart. While I’ve never met any of their members myself, I’ve been lucky enough to have some of their servants patronize my humble shop. I can at least say that this city’s nobility has an eye for quality, if nothing else.

### *The Sangrenards*

Tracing their lineage all the way back to the great merchant Lady Verl Sangrenard, this vulpin family reaps dividends from investments in trade all over the city. The Sangrenards hold a great deal of sway in Alderheart’s Merchant’s Guild, and folks say that a new business venture can fail or flourish based on the family’s approval. In addition to their clout, the Sangrenard’s market savvy has made them one of the wealthiest families among Alderheart’s nobility. Unlike many of the other noble families, whose fabulous manors are located in the city’s Canopy, the Sangrenard’s estate can be found just outside the Trunk Market. Their opulent manor house has four levels, and is one of the largest homes to have ever been shaped out of Alderheart.

### *The Ebonharts*

This family of kindled corvum descends from Edwin Ebonheart, one of the city’s founders. Though Edwin played a large role in establishing the Inventor’s Guild, the family has since distanced itself from the organization. Instead, the Ebonharts have gained recognition for their generous donations to the Avium, which they have patronized for many songs. As such, numerous prominent alumni from the magical college bear the Ebonheart name. Because of this, the Ebonharts have earned a reputation as local experts, and a skilled argument from them can make even the most flawed idea sound reasonable. Their stately home in the Boughs District is built from artificially petrified deadwood, just like the college they so avidly support.

### *The Forecombs*

A lineage of bright gallus with a long history of sitting on the Birdfolk Council, the Forecombs rose to power in Alderheart shortly after the city’s formation. Hailing from the farming perch of Brackenmill, the Forecombs are a long-standing family with a controlling interest in the guild that manages Brackenmill’s tree-farms. Though there’s plenty of talk on the street about the Forecombs using their ties to the Council to further Brackenmill’s interests, the Forecombs remain well-liked by most Alderites for their sensible, fair-minded approach to politics. Members of the family hold appointments in various positions across the city, and the former Council Speaker Aeil Forecomb is remembered fondly for her charismatic leadership.

### *The Windswefts*

Another noble family descended from a city founder, the Windswefts draw their surname from none other than the First Speaker, Ava Windsweft. While the family doesn’t have as much power as it did when Ava sat on the Birdfolk Council, they have instead made a name for themselves as trend-setters and socialites of the Great Tree City. Known for their

lavish galas and parties, the Windswefts are one of the most well-connected families in Alderheart, and have the ear of the most powerful and influential folks around. The Windswefts also own a lavish store known as Zephyr and Co., which has become an institution in the Canopy Market. It's a little too much frippery for my taste, but it's hard to argue with their success.

### ***The Jonquils***

One of the most recent families to be counted among the city's nobility, the Jonquils are hedges who came from humble beginnings. Once, they were tailors who ran a small but successful business in Alderheart's Trunk Market, making specialty garments for hedges and jerbeens. Now, they are one of the city's foremost producers of luxury clothing for humblefolk, and trendsetters in upscale canopy boutiques. The Jonquils have since moved into Alderheart's canopy, and inhabit a luxurious home in the Boughs District.

## **ALDERHEART CUISINE**

Alderheart is a diverse city, made up of folks from all over Everden. It's no surprise then, that the Great Tree City has developed its own unique type of cuisine, unlike that found anywhere else in the Wood. Seeds, nuts, and grubs form the basic staples of most birdfolk cooking, with insect or fish meat serving as the centerpiece for most dishes. Strig dishes, however, often substitute insect meat for game animals. Vegetables are rare in birdfolk dishes, except for those which can be grown in trees. Root vegetables, like carrots and potatoes, are treated as delicacies in birdfolk cuisine, owing to the lack of large-scale ground-based farms near perches.

Humblefolk cooking is far more varied than birdfolk cuisine, and there is little in common between the two. For example, I'm told that hedge cooking is almost entirely vegetarian, and has many dishes made to be served cold, since the greens and flowers they use as ingredients are incredibly delicate. Mapach cuisine includes wild game, a mix of earth-grown and tree-grown vegetables, and special berries which are smoked and ground into pungent spices.

## **LOCAL SPECIALITIES**

While traveling the branchroads of this city, you can find street vendors and eateries showcasing all kinds of meals and beverages, from twists on woodland village staples to food that started in one of the districts. Regardless of their origins, the following local specialties are distinctly Alderite and can be found just about anywhere in the city. You haven't truly experienced Alderheart until you've tried at least one of these!

### ***Berry Juices***

The city's great diversity has led to the creation of many interesting and refreshing juice mixtures, a variety of which are sold by street vendors. Many of these vendors boast "freshly-squeezed" preparations using fruit from local tree-growing vines, while others sell juice made from imported fruits from faraway places. While vendors selling imported juice may offer different tastes, I heartily recommend the local selection, especially if you find your way to the city in Shimmertide



when the fruit-bearing vines are ready to harvest. My personal favorite is Hedwig's Magnificent Mixes. Just look for the cart with a strand of flowers over it!

### ***Comber Salad***

A hedge specialty originally brought to Alderheart by way of galluses migrating from villages on the forest floor, this dish gets its name from the variety of ingredients used to make it. As the saying goes, "Comb the forest through the dawn, by noon we'll have a salad on!" The salad is served cold and made of different kinds of edible leaves and flowers. The traditional version also includes button mushrooms and cooked roots. The Alderite twist comes from replacing the flowers and leaves with vine-grown substitutes and adding in seeds, nuts, and sometimes even cooked grubs. However, most hedges will tell you it's not really a comber salad unless it's vegetarian.

### ***Elderberry Wine***

The drink of choice for Alderheart's upper crust, this fine wine is brewed from fermented elderberries cultivated around the Wood. They say that some of the best berries for wine-making come from small groves around The Crest. There, the soil is dryer and rich with minerals that wash down from the mountains during infrequent storms. Some vintners have even grown their own colors of elderberries, creating wines with a ruby hue or prized batches that shine with a golden finish. Take it from someone who's tasted many a wine: should you ever have the good fortune to sample a glass of well-aged elderberry, it's worth savoring.

### ***Gapachi***

A mapach dish showcasing their hallmark ingenuity, gapachi was devised by families in the Branches District, using only the ingredients available to them. Since then, it has become a favorite among Alderites. This spicy vine-veggie ragu is served over long beans cooked until they are bright and tender. A word of caution: Alderites like this dish very spicy, so be sure to ask for it mild unless you're feeling adventurous.



### Fried Floona

A favorite of street vendors throughout the city, this dish was popularized by the people of Saltar's Port before it spread to Alderheart. Floona are a type of small schooling fish with a rich flavor and a high fat content. When fried in a special batter of ground seeds and grains, they become a golden, crispy treat! Usually, a batch of fried floona is served in a nest-like basket. A unique Alderite flourish comes in the form of spicy, tangy dipping sauces made from ingredients from across the Wood. There are always branchroad vendors trying out new flavors of sauce, and the best floona in the city is hotly debated among the locals. I'm no authority on floona, but there's a little stand off of Primrose Way in the Guild Quarter that sells baskets with a grantha berry sauce that reminds me of home.

### Saltmeat

Saltmeat isn't a single dish but a catch-all term for strips of meat that have been salted and cured using a traditional vulpin technique. This special process makes them chewy and flavorful, but also prevents the meat from spoiling for a long time. Though traditional saltmeat is done with wild game, Alderites typically prefer insect and fish saltmeat. It's remarkably similar to the plant-based rations from my homeland, which are less salty, but make for a good snack when hiking long treks across the steppe.

### Vine Ale

A brew perfected by gallus tree-farmers in Brackenmill, traditional vine ale is made from leftover seeds from the last song's flower harvest. The seeds are roasted and then fermented in large basins until they take on the brewmaster's desired flavor. Relatively common throughout taverns and eateries in the city, there are as many different kinds of vine ale as there are brewers, and the quality ranges from poor to excellent. Though many take the craft of brewing very seriously, vine ale is cheaper to make than elderberry wine, and tends to be associated with Alderheart's lower class.



### Grilled Hornsteak

A well-loved dish, the hornsteak began as a humble farmer's meal in Brackenmill before it started appearing on plates in the finest dining establishments in the canopy. The recipe is simple enough: the steak from a full-grown bull Hornbeetle is spiced and seared to perfection. The price can range from a few grifs to a fistful of allers, depending on the venue, the cut of meat, and notoriety of the chef. It's usually served with seasonal tree vegetables, but eating it with ground-grown veggies has become the latest trend.



### Scrallas

This birdfolk dish was developed in the city and has since become its specialty. Scrallas is a hot soup made from a stock composed of mashed grubs into which cooked worms have been added as noodles. Fried beetle shells are often sprinkled on top for crunch. Though it's a hit with birdfolk and even some humblefolk in the city, it leaves most other visitors scratching their heads. I've tried it once and it's certainly...unique.



*Festival of Gaspard*

## HOLIDAYS IN ALDERHEART

As Alderheart is the cultural center of Humblewood, it's not surprising that its calendar of festivals spans the entire year, and that its most prominent holidays are observed outside the city as well. Still, in this humble traveler's opinion, these grand festivities are best experienced among the throngs of revelers in Humblewood's capital.

### FIRST BLOSSOM

First Blossom celebrates the return of Ardea's warmth, and is observed beginning on the first Ardwil in Springbloom. For five days, the city is a bustle as folks partake in festivities: traditional dances, choral performances, and naming ceremonies for hatchlings, all in honor of the Dawnmother. Throughout these revels, the markets are adorned with flowers, and shops around town sell seedcakes and sweetbreads adorned with floral designs. Work is suspended on the last day of the festival, and people hold great feasts in their homes. During this day, younglings who have been good all throughout the song open gifts said to be delivered by Ardea's celestial messengers, while the young and old alike share their hopes for the song to come. The celebration continues until the sun sets on this last day, when Tyton, Amaranthine of the night, draws the curtain

on the measure's revels. Celebrating any later than this risks offense to the Nightfather, whose gentle darkness is just as important to life in the forest as the Dawnmother's radiance.

### THE FOUNDING

From the 24th to the 30th of Springbloom, this measure-long holiday celebrates the founding of Alderheart. Throughout this holiday, plays and reenactments teach of the Founders' struggle with the First Coalition, the creation of Alderheart, and the subsequent victory over the bandits. Though this is a time to celebrate the city's history, most of the songkeepers I spoke with were dismayed that the crucial part played by humblefolk, like the vulpin Lady Verl Sangrenard and the mapach Geswick Switch, have been left out of more recent stage shows. Instead, many of the performances play up the ferocity of the First Coalition and the bravery of the Perch Guard. These wise scholars are doing what they can to keep Alderheart's proud history of cooperation alive, so I'd advise you pay the local museum a visit after leaving the theater to get the full story, especially since entrance is free throughout the festivities.

## SEEDSGIFT

The festival of Seedsgift starts on the 1st Handwil of Seedsown and lasts for six days. This traditional farmers' festival pays homage to Hanera, the Amaranthine of plants and the soil, and celebrates gardening and the sowing of new seeds in tree-farms. Throughout the celebrations, displays of bright spring flowers can be seen across the city. This holiday features nights of dancing, carnival games, minstrel performances, and sweetseeds, its namesake, a candy made from seeds soaked in honey and stuck together in balls. Sweetseeds are a favorite among the younglings, but for you grown folk there's a special kind made with seeds soaked in mead. Just be sure not to get the two confused!

## FESTIVAL OF CHAMPIONS

This large celebration, which announces the arrival of summer, is one of the most popular in Alderheart. From the 5th to 11th of Shimmertide, daily contests are held honoring the humblefolk Amaranthine Gaspard, who inspires others to follow his courageous example. Each day of the festivities is dedicated to one of Gaspard's five trusted companions, and showcases events that reflect that companion's unique talents. Those wishing to prove their courage and skill compete in daily contests consisting of jousts, archery, sword fighting. A duel with light foils is held on the fifth day, and is considered the highlight of the celebration. This day honors Denell of the Blossoming Blade, a Jerbeen swordmaster responsible for training Gaspard in the art of dueling. The sixth day is devoted to Gaspard himself. During each event, you can find flags and cheering horns marked with the heraldry of your chosen contender for sale at shops. There's nothing quite like watching from the stands during a heated joust—the energy in the air is electric, and the cheers roar like thunder! After each tournament, great feasts and celebrations carry on into the evening, and everyone, winner and loser, is treated to some of the best food, drink, and music in the city. On the last day, a grand ceremony is held for the contest winners, and each is rewarded with a magical object or other similarly grand prize. The winner of the duel is also allowed to lead the Farrosmarch parade, which is considered an incredible honor.

## FARROSMARCH

The Farrosmarch parade is held on the 20th day of Shimmertide in honor of the raptor huntress Farro Keer, founder of the Perch Guard. In this grand march, a Perch Guard contingent parades through the Mainstay of the canopy in shining armor, with their spears held high and banners waving proudly. The procession ends at the Bramble Gate, where the Captain of the Guard makes a speech to the assembled crowd. The historians I spoke with told me this march was originally meant to symbolize the duty of the early Perch Guard to protect the village of Bramblewell against bandits, though nowadays most Alderites know the festival as a time to honor the Perch Guard for their service to the Wood. Be sure to be extra kind to any city guards you might see on this day, as it shows respect for the work they do to keep Humblewood safe.

## THE ASCENT

A commemoration of Gesme's flight to steal fire from the sun, The Ascent takes place on the third Ardwil in Suncrest and finishes with the holiday of Gesme's Gift the following day. On this night, younglings are sent on a mock reenactment of Gesme's feat. First, they are given sticks to carry to a designated plaza high in the canopy, where a large brazier representing the sun awaits them. Then, after lighting their torches, the younglings return to festival squares to light campfires, around which storytellers recount legends of the Amaranthine. These festival squares also have games, dancing, and face painting for all to enjoy. Sparksticks, thin twigs that burn slowly in a sparkle of colored light, are sold and handed out from shops. Afterwards, a grand feast is held to open the next day's celebration.

## GESME'S GIFT

The morning after celebrations of The Ascent, the holiday of Gesme's Gift begins, continuing the festivities. Flames lit by younglings the previous evening are tended through the night by priests, just as the folk of the Wood tend the flame of knowledge given by Gesme. Until the end of the celebrations, anyone is welcome to sit in on free lectures given by scholars and craftspeople around the city to learn the basics of a skill or trade. Younglings who participated in the previous evening's revels are encouraged to learn something new, and some even choose to follow a mentor for the day. That night, festivities are concluded with another round of feasting around the campfires, which are eventually doused by priests of Gesme using special pitchers shaped from oakwood. According to the priesthood, this is done because Gesme's flame must be handled properly, for just as a wildfire can consume a forest, so too can a restless mind consume itself.

## FESTIVAL OF GUILDS

One of the highlights of the summer season in this great city is the Festival of Guilds. In this twelve day long celebration from the 12th to the 23rd of Glimmerhaze, a handful of Alderheart's most prominent city guilds hold events to showcase their skills. Not every guild has a special event dedicated to them, but the festival as a whole salutes the work of every guild in the city, from the largest to the most humble. Each guild hall puts up decorations, demonstrates their work, and offers events to help the public learn about their importance. Depending on the guild, this can include games for younglings, special performances of skill, and prizes to be won in guessing games and raffles.

### *Day of Delights*

The festival begins with the Day of Delights on the 12th of Glimmerhaze. In honor of the Gourmand's Guild, every tavern, cookhouse, and eatery in Alderheart offers samples of their food, as well as special rates on their signature dish. Whether you're a local or a visitor, this is a perfect time to explore the tastes of the city.

## *The Golden Gala*

Though it's the Festival of Guild's second event, the festival isn't considered to really start until the 15th of Glimmerhaze, when the Merchant's and Cartwright's Guilds band together to lead a great parade through the city. Beginning in the Trunk Market and winding up the Mainstay to the Merchant's Guild headquarters in the canopy, the Golden Parade displays wealth and extravagance with dancing, music, and colorful floats that shower the crowds with noisemakers, trinkets, and confetti. In the evening, the Merchant's Guild sponsors an exclusive party in the canopy, the eponymous Golden Gala. Tickets for the Gala always sell out before the event, and their price is prohibitive to all but wealthiest Alderites.

## *The Unburdening*

Coming on the heels of the Golden Gala, the 16th of Glimmerhaze marks The Unburdening. This event, sponsored by the Cartwright's Guild, gives every beast of burden and worker animal in the city a day off. All guilds close operations for this day, as folks are encouraged to spend the day with their animal companions. Whenever I'm in town for The Unburdening, I usually close shop for the day so I can show Bello around the city's parks, and spend some quality time with my wooly friend.

## *Fleetflight*

Taking place on the 18th of Glimmerhaze, Fleetflight is a day that honors the Courier's Guild of Alderheart. The highlight of the day is a footrace which is designed to test common folk's knowledge of city routes. Members of various courier companies throughout the city compete as well, earning prestige and status within their guild for a good showing. The winners receive a substantial prize and those who manage to make it in record times are usually scouted by one or more companies operating under the Courier's Guild association.

## *Emberspark*

The Smith's Guild holds a large demonstration of their work, known as Emberspark, on the 20th of Glimmerhaze. A huge display is established in the Canopy Market, where metal refiners and smiths from the guild show off their craftsmanship. Smiths will also offer their services for a reduced rate during the festivities, which makes it a great time to visit should you find yourself with armor that needs patching or weapons in need of sharpening.

## *The Grand Imagining*

Finally, on the last day of the festival, the 23rd of Glimmerhaze, a great tinker's fair is held to showcase the wondrous new innovations from the Inventor's Guild. The Grand Imagining celebrates ingenuity in all its forms, and so the highest-ranking members of the Inventor's Guild make it their responsibility to judge crafting fairs held all over town. This includes the largest scroungecraft fair in Humblewood, organized in partnership with various mapach communities across Alderheart. Winning here can lead to an apprenticeship with the Inventor's Guild, as well as potentially lucrative investments in your invention. Last year, I saw an inventor demonstrate a self-powered cart, propelled by slimes dashing up miniature water wheels. Impractical, but impressive!

## *FOOL'S FROLICK*

The last day of Glimmerhaze marks the coming of fall and the turning of the seasons, from warmth and light, to cold and darkness. During this time of transition, folks in the city hold a grand festival to the Amaranthine Clhuran, who governs all change, both good and ill. In the tradition of this holiday, citizens play tricks on one another, and act as foolishly as possible within the bounds of the law. Festive Alderites can be seen wearing outlandish jester hats throughout the day. Most shops are closed on this holiday, but in honor of the celebration, those that remain open sell their wares at outrageous prices. Alderites know not to conduct serious business or make any deals on this day, as it is well known that everything during this day is done in jest.

## *TREE'S BOUNTY*

Tree's Bounty is a grand harvest festival observed in early fall, on the 10th day of Seedreap. It is a time for cheer, in which gifts are exchanged in the spirit of generosity between friends and loved ones. This holiday pays homage to the Amaranthine most closely tied with growth and plant life: Ardea, Cairith, Hanera, and Henwin. The images of each are shaped into decorative gourds using the same natural, gentle magic which shapes the Evertree. These gourds are lit from within by jars of fireflies and are displayed at night in the Canopy Market for all to see. The gourds remain in a place of prominence for up to 10 days after the festival, though they are removed the moment they begin to rot. Take it from me, whether or not you hail from Alderheart, it's your civic duty to report when those gourds start smelling a little ripe!

## *WINDSTREK*

On the second Redwil in the blustery autumn chorus of Treeturn, Alderites celebrate the subdued holiday known as Windstrek. This is the holiday of travelers, who are watched over by the Amaranthine Reya. Anyone who wants to participate may embark on a journey to a place in the Wood they've never been. This can be a place within the city, or somewhere even farther afield. Though travelers are given the holiday's 10-day duration for their travels, some brave souls choose to take even longer voyages. Upon their return, travelers are expected to share stories of their journey with friends and loved ones about what they saw, and what they faced along the way. On the last day of Windstrek, shops close but taverns and public houses remain open, providing free food and lodging until the next dawn to travelers returning from, or embarking on new journeys.

## THE GLOAMING

Said to commemorate the moment when Ardea hands dominion of the seasons over to Tyton, The Gloaming is an eerie holiday beloved by younglings throughout the city. It takes place on the last Tydwil in Shadesway, when the shadows grow long and a chill wind whips through Alderheart's branches. On this day, it is said that Tyton sends his spectral owl servants to scour the Wood and look for souls to carry across to the lands of death. According to the old stories, the only way to avoid being taken is to disguise oneself as these nether spirits to trick them and avoid their attention. Folks gather in their costumes and hold celebrations throughout the night, sharing eerie tales of ghosts and spirits. Accompanying Tyton's spectral owls, apparitions are said to cross over from beyond the veil of death, haunting those who disrespect the dead.

## THE OFFERING

The Offering is a ceremony that was brought to Alderheart by strigs who moved here from The Crest, and is still widely observed among their descendants. It is a solemn holiday, honoring Altus' flight from the lands of night and death to bring the winter season. Not everyone participates in this holiday, but those who do choose to give up something they value through the harshest part of winter, from the 25th of Firstfrost until the day of The Waking. That which is given up is an intensely personal choice, ranging from a sweet or indulgence to a favorite game or activity. Monks dedicated to Altus' teachings will begin fasting, or will isolate themselves in the harsh mountains for the entire period to demonstrate their devotion. In the city, The Offering is marked by a day of traditional games which test the endurance of the players, and custom dictates that any meals served on this day be simple and hearty.

Risa Hulett



## GLOWINGTIDE

A festival of light and warmth in winter, Glowingtide is a holiday observed by birdfolk and humblefolk all across Humblewood. Spanning from the 20th to the 30th of Wintersdeep, this ten-day celebration sees the Great Tree City lit top to bottom by thousands of small lights in windows, storefronts, and doorways. While many of these lights are candles, it is common to see public displays of magical lights, as well as lanterns made from luminescent slime. Among Alderites, it is a season to share the light and warmth of the Dawnmother with others, to emphasize charity to the less fortunate and good cheer for all. On the last day, great feasts are held in the Amaranthine's honor within each district. There is enough food at these feasts to share with the entire community, and all are welcome to attend. Winters in the tree city may be cold, but truly, this holiday illustrates the warmth of Alderheart's people.

## THE WAKING

On the 25th of Newlight, Alderites celebrate The Waking to commemorate the stirring of the Wood from winter and the coming of the next song's spring. Also originating with the strigs who migrated to the city from their mountain homes long ago, The Waking is a time for Alderites to reflect on the song nearly ended and rejoice for the new song to come. It is also marked as an end to the coldest and darkest part of the song, and the time when Altus returns once more to the lands of death. Strigs say that those who have made it this far have passed the test of Altus' winter, and the occasion is marked with a night of feasting that carries over into the next day. Many shops and businesses are closed on the 26th of Newlight, known as "Waking Day," and most folks spend the day with their families.

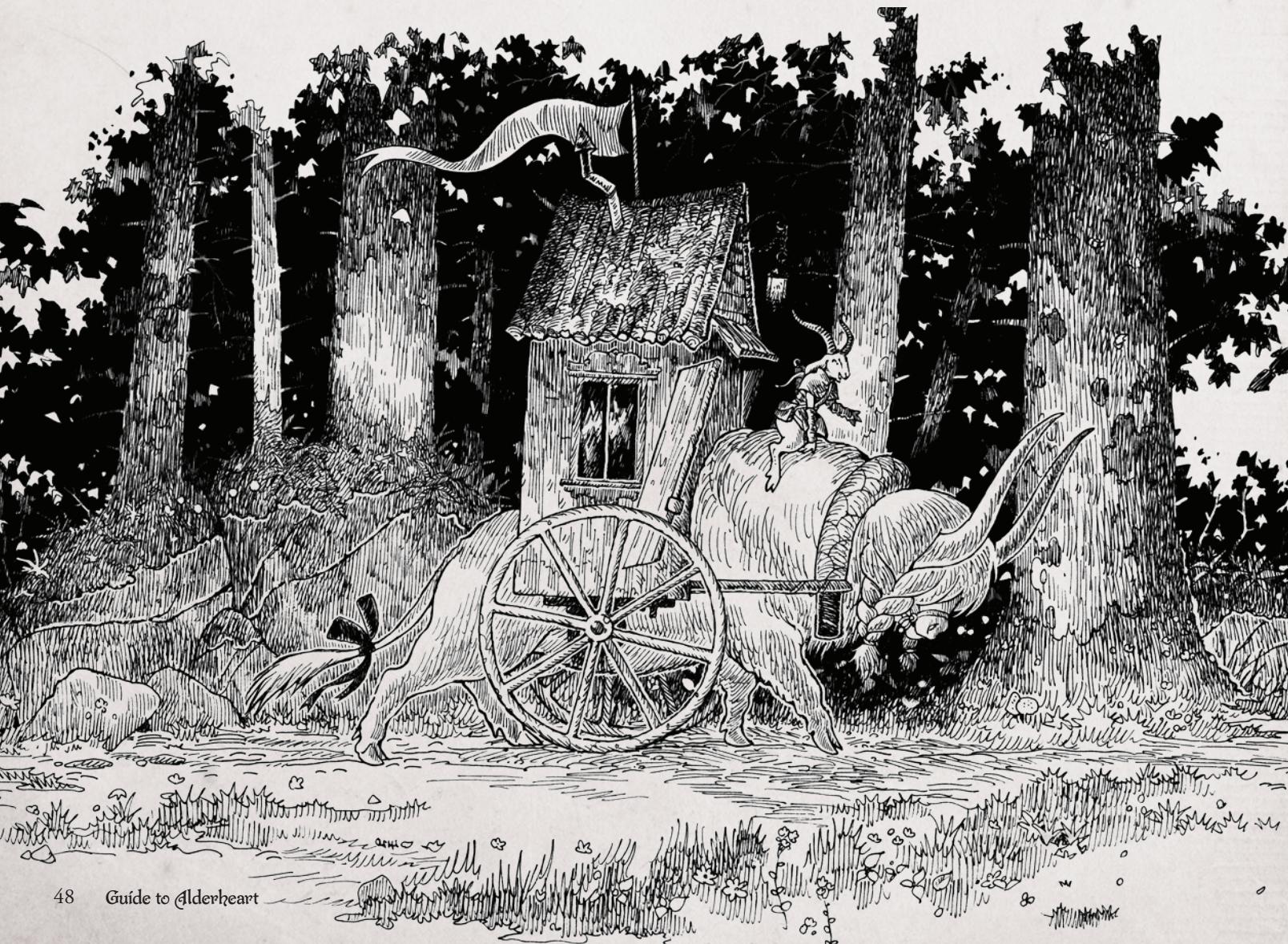


## A Farewell From the Author

Alderheart is vast and, though I've only provided you with a glimpse of the Great Tree City's wonders, I hope you've found the knowledge I collected over my many stays in the city to be useful, or at least entertaining. If you ever visit, I'm sure there'll be even more for you to discover, as the Great Tree City is alive and changing every day. Who knows, maybe we'll meet each other along the trail?

May your feet find you safe wherever you roam, may your torches burn bright to stave off the gloam, and may the roads you travel lead you back home.

Fond farewells from myself and Bello,  
Jonall Hannu The Gloaming





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